

STRUGGLING IDPS OF NORTH WAZIRISTAN IN THE WAKE OF OPERATION ZARB-E-AZB

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Abstract

Pakistan has been adversely affected by the war on terror. It has caused humanitarian catastrophe on an unimaginable scale. Pakistan being the frontline state has conducted number of operations against militants in the FATA region. In the aftermath of the operation Zarb-e-Azb; thousands of people fled from their homes and temporarily migrated to safe areas to seek refuge. This research paper explores the challenges faced by IDPs of North Waziristan during the operation Zarb-e-Azb and in particular highlight challenges which IDPs are facing on return. On return to their native areas IDPs have faced immense challenges due to lack of comprehensive resettlement plan by the government of Pakistan. The research will suggest some recommendations that how government can duly respond to the crisis. How government can support voluntary and durable returns?

Key words: Operation Zarb-e-Azb, Militants, Return, North Waziristan, FATA, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

Introduction

The government of Pakistan launched counterinsurgency operation against terrorist groups in North Waziristan tribal agency on 15th June 2014. The operation impelled large scale displacements to adjoining districts of Lakki Marwat, Banu, Hangu, Tank and Dera Ismail Khan. Large numbers of people were forced to vacate their homes and they left behind valuable belongings such as furniture, electronics, livestock, standing crops etc. On 8th July 2014, FATA Disaster Management Authority (FDMA) made the figures public of those displaced in the aftermath of the operation Zarb-e-Azb. According to FDMA data “the total number of internally

displaced persons (IDPs) till the time registered with the authorities was 787,888. Moreover, the total number of families counted was 62,493, including 211,549 male and 236,883 female members, while the number of children was 339,456.”¹ With every passing day the number of IDPs increased. United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) issued data till 5th September 2014 as, the overall registered displaced population from North Waziristan was 961,000 in numbers.²

According to FDMA representative, “the government was determined to register every displaced person in order to ensure speedy distribution of relief amount, goods and other services so that no family remained deprived of the facilities”.³ Ironically government of Pakistan remained ill-equipped in dealing with large scale humanitarian crisis. Authorities were condemned for a lack of preparedness for the inevitable exodus of IDPs.⁴ Pitiably IDPs were on foot from North Waziristan to Bannu in the scorching heat, and on their arrival they were not been provided with the kind of assistance they were suppose to receive. IDPs faced a multitude of difficulties in registration process, water shortage, endless line up to ration points, lack of electricity facilities, inadequate health facilities and extreme weather conditions etc. IDPs preferred to stay temporarily with close friends and relatives in hired accommodations moreover; they preferred to stay in government schools instead of government provided tents.⁵ This evacuation phase was badly handled by the government of Pakistan.

In January 2015 almost 90 percent of the area was declared clear of militants by Pakistan’s military hence return becomes the next important phase. Federal Minister for State and Frontier Regions Abdul Qadir Baloch, announced that the displaced tribesmen of North Waziristan will return to their native areas as soon as the middle of February. The process of return and rehabilitation will be completed shortly but the government of Pakistan requires huge amount for this return phase because displacement was on a large scale.

Operation Zarb-e-Azb had long been expected due to terrorist activities from time to time even during peace negotiations. Therefore, the Government of Pakistan should have been prepared for humanitarian crisis. Now as IDPs are returning, pressing challenge is to craft such conditions which can sustain voluntary and durable returns. This comprises rehabilitation, reconstruction, and restoration of livelihoods and access to basic necessities. This requires a well thought-out plan for the post-operation environment. As according to Holmes, “most States confronting the crisis of internally displaced persons do not have national policies or institutional mechanisms to cater the needs of IDPs”. Now the question arises whether Pakistan is one of those states as aforementioned in the statement of Holmes.

Background of the Operation Zarb-e-Azb

After general elections 2013, peace negotiations were announced by newly elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. On 1st March 2014, one month truce was agreed between the government and the Taliban.⁶ Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) spokesperson Shahidullah Shahid said, “All comrades to respect the decision and refrain from any activity during the ceasefire period.” Pakistani authorities responded to his statement and said, “They would reciprocate the gesture by immediately stopping the “surgical strikes” against the extremists, thus raising hopes that the seven-year-long violent insurgency in Pakistan would finally come to an end.”⁷

On 26th March 2014, first round of talks was held between members appointed by the Taliban and the government of Pakistan in Islamabad at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa House.⁸ Pakistani government team comprised of four i.e.: “PM Advisor on National Affairs Irfan Siddique veteran journalist, Rahimullah Yusufzai, former ambassador and expert on Afghanistan affairs Rustam Shah Mohmand and former ISI official Amir Shah to facilitate the dialogue. Whereas, banned militant organisation Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) nominated Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan, Maulana Samiul Haq, former chief cleric of the Lal

Masjid in Islamabad Maulana Abdul Aziz, Professor Mohammad Ibrahim of the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and Mufti Kifayatullah, a former lawmaker of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) from Mansehra to hold talks with the government negotiators. However, PTI chief Imran Khan backed out of the Taliban committee after his party declined a request for him to represent them in peace talks with the government today. Moreover, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazl ur Rehman also announced that he would not participate in the dialogue process.”⁹ Other than these two, rest of the representatives travelled to the designated area near Afghan border by helicopter. After a preliminary meeting with the Taliban all the committee members were very optimistic about the dialogue. Their expectations were high that soon there will be break from the past rancorous events.

“The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emphasized upon two major points in order to continue peace talks. One was the creation of a demilitarised peace zone in mountainous Shakto in South Waziristan Agency of FATA, to allow freedom of movement and two, the release of non-combatants.”¹⁰ By late March “the government agreed to release 12 low-level prisoners but it refused Taliban demands for a “peace zone” where militants could move freely in South Waziristan.”¹¹

Unfortunately, there was no peace even during the ceasefire because militants continued their terrorist activities and the reason was that government of Pakistan didn't agree upon all the demands. Some of the major attacks carried out were, “On 3rd March 2014, a gun and grenade attack at Islamabad's lower courts killed 11 people including an additional session judge. A bomb blast at Islamabad's vegetable market killed 23 people on 9th April 2014”.¹² On 16th April 2014 the Pakistani Taliban announced that they were ending a six-week-old cease-fire but would continue peace talks with the Pakistani government.¹³ On 21st April 2014, TTP killed a civilian and five policemen in the area of Badhaber Peshawar whereas, on 22nd April 2014 TTP exploded a police vehicle in Charsadda killing one policeman and injuring 14

policemen and 26 civilians. On 26th April 2014, bombing in Karachi again killed six and injured 28.¹⁴

Last nail in the coffin of peace talks was the 8th June 2014 Karachi airport incident when 10 militants attacked the Jinnah International Airport Karachi. 36 people were killed, including all 10 attackers, and at least 18 were wounded.¹⁵ Taliban spokesman Shahidullah Shahid gave statement regarding the attack as, “The main goal of this attack was to damage the government, including by hijacking planes and destroying state installations. This was just an example of what we are capable of doing and there is yet more to come. The government should be prepared for even worse attacks.”¹⁶

After one week of the attack, on 15th June 2014 the Government of Pakistan, launched full-fledge operation named *Zarb-e-Azb* against militant groups in North Waziristan Agency of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This operation was launched after exhaustion of the option of talks with militants. Militants were not ready to lay down their arms even during ceasefire as mentioned above. As a result of the operation there was an influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Locals fled from their homes and migrated to safe areas in order to save their lives.

Definition of an IDP

According to the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998), “Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally-recognized state border.”

Rights of an IDP

The UN Guiding Principles on IDPs clearly state that, “internally displaced persons are entitled to enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other persons in their country.”

According to John Holmes, “Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are less clearly identified and protected than refugees but are often particularly vulnerable. They may lose their property and access to livelihoods; they run a high risk of being separated from family members; they may be discriminated against merely for being displaced; they often lack identity cards, which make it more difficult for them to access basic services and prevents them from exercising their political rights. They are also often more vulnerable than other groups to abuse by others. The most difficult vulnerability to measure, though, is their loss of dignity and as the period of displacement increases, their sense of hope.”¹⁷

Protection of an IDP

As displaced people are within the national territory, the IDPs do not qualify for the international services that the ‘refugees’ are entitled to under the international law. Protection as well as rehabilitation of the internally displaced is the moral and legal liability of their own government. There are 12 benchmarks of National Responsibility which governments should take towards ensuring successful national response to internal displacement.¹⁸

National Responsibility

To assist governments with the task to address problems of internal displacement, Erin Mooney introduced twelve benchmarks of national responsibility.¹⁹ They are all those steps which government can easily perform to help and cater the needs of displaced people. It is a comprehensive document based on government’s duty towards its displaced population.

Its emphasis is on protection of rights of displaced in harmony with international law. Twelve benchmarks are as follow:

- “Preventing displacement and minimizing its adverse effects;
- Raising national awareness about the problem;
- Collecting data on the number and condition of IDPs;
- Supporting training on the rights of IDPs;
- Creating a legal framework upholding the rights of IDPs;
- Developing a national policy on internal displacement;
- Designating an institutional focal point on IDPs;
- Encouraging national human rights institutions to address internal displacement;
- Ensuring that IDPs participate in decision making;
- Supporting durable solutions;
- Allocating adequate resources to address internal displacement; and
- Cooperating with the international community when national capacity is insufficient.”²⁰

The above mentioned initiatives suggested by Erin Mooney are common objectives for all the countries burdened by internal displacement. Pakistan has hardly applied any of the benchmarks of national responsibility in handling its worst IDPs crisis. By acting upon these benchmarks IDPs crisis can be managed and resolved easily and smoothly. Moreover, their rights can be protected.

Influx of IDPs

With the launch of counterinsurgency operation Zarb-e-Azb temporary migration of population from North Waziristan started. According to ISPR administrative support was provided to internally displaced people on various check points and support included essential food items and medicines. Various registration points at Saidgai post were established separately for male and female to enhance the organized evacuation of civilians. A tented village was established for the IDPs at Bakka Khel near Bannu which

according to the UNHCR had the capacity to accommodate two hundred thousand people. “An army medical corps field hospital was established in Bannu for displaced persons.”²¹ The IDPs were provided cash assistance both by the Federal and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa governments. Political management and FDMA also tried to participate as swiftly as the security forces in logistical and administrative arrangements. In the beginning of June 2014 around 450,000 IDPs arrived in Bannu. Later on, number of IDPs was increased to 572,529. According to United Nations Office OCHA, “as of 5th September, 2014 the total registered displaced population from North Waziristan is around 961,000 individuals (89,954 families).”²² Overall slowly and gradually number of IDPs increased. Most of the population was of women and children.

The Federal Government disbursed over 1.24 billion rupees as cash assistance among IDPs in the first two months after they left their homes. Similarly, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government disbursed 779.967 million rupees under Esaar-e-Pakhtunkhwa Programme among 56,590 IDPs families. Each family was provided 23,000 rupees under the Esaar programme. Whereas, the United States gave aid of \$ 31 million and the government of United Arab Emirates (UAE) gave \$20.5 million for the internally displaced of North Waziristan for relief purposes.²³ Relief agencies played vital role as well by helping the government in relief matters.

Problems of IDPs

There are short term and long term problems of internally displaced people. Short term problems which IDPs face are immediate relief, shelter, food, medicines, clean drinking water, sanitation etc. However, the long term problems are scary as well as challenging because IDPs need to rebuild their homes which have been ruined and destroyed during the operation. For this they require significant help of the government as well as international donors. North Waziristan will face massive reconstruction and development challenges. Following return phase of North Waziristan IDPs is discussed.

Return of IDPs to North Waziristan

By 16th December 2014, “Pakistan Army cleared 90 percent of North Waziristan Agency of terrorists.”²⁴ According to chief officer of Zarb-e-Azb Operation (Major General Zafarullah Khan), “forces killed 1,198 terrorists and injured 356 during the on-going military operation launched in June 2014.” 2,708 square kilometre of area was cleared in June and so was it vacated while military pledged to clear rest of the areas of North Waziristan as well. During the warfare Pakistan Army had 197 casualties. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif praised its military while saying, “Operation Zarb-e-Azb had inflicted a fatal blow on terrorists and Pakistan’s armed forces had given exemplary sacrifices in this operation.”²⁵ North Waziristan is an area of intense weather especially in winters but Pakistan military effectively applied its counterterrorism strategies and operated successfully in risky terrain. Partially peace has been restored as a result of operation and full can be restored with the successful return phase.

According to ISPR, “Huge cache of arms and ammunition, communication equipment, and other logistics facilities, used by terrorists have been destroyed uprooting their ability to attack as a coherent force.”²⁶ During the ongoing Military Operation Zarb-e-Azb in large numbers alleged terrorists have been arrested by the Pakistan army. With the mutual decision of military and civil leadership, these alleged terrorists would be tried in the military courts. Trial of terrorists will be on priority bases because the ones involved in major terrorist activities will be tried first and then the terrorists with the minor activities will be tried accordingly.

On 8th December 2014, “Army gave go-ahead to civilian authorities to start the phase-wise return of over one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) to North Waziristan Agency (NWA).”²⁷ Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif approved the phase-wise return of the IDPs after reviewing progress so far made in the North Waziristan operation.²⁸ The government announced IDPs could return as early as February, causing them to rejoice on the streets of Bannu with

drums and dancing.²⁹ Federal Minister for Safron announced the return of the Internally Displaced of North Waziristan by the middle of 15th February 2015.³⁰

Challenges on Return

“When displaced people of Swat started going home in July-August 2009, they returned to find destroyed houses, schools, clinics and hospitals; damaged fields and orchards; markets crippled by food shortages; and the military’s continued curfews.”³¹ Now after months of displacement, thousands of war-affected Pakistanis who had been displaced from their hometowns in the restive North Waziristan tribal region are returning. They anticipate the same situation they will face as their countrymen faced in South Waziristan.

Therefore displaced people argue that they are not sure whether the government is committed to pledges it made to pay compensation on their losses and rebuild their shattered houses. The return of the Pakistani displaced people could turn into a major challenge between the government and the army if the government fails to fulfil all its commitments. The internally displaced people from North Waziristan demand compensation and reconstruction of their homes before they return from the IDP camps.³² They have also demanded compensation for basic necessities before they return to North Waziristan.

While giving an interview to Tribal News Network, tribesmen said, “houses, markets and other infrastructure had been destroyed in military operation against militants in the agency and that the government should complete reconstruction work before sending them back to the area.”³³ According to displaced people, government should at least disburse rupees three lacs to each family because when they return may face serious problems in their lives. Their houses, business have been completely ruined moreover harsh weather of their area makes them more vulnerable.

According to Government of Pakistan, it requires \$753 million aid for the rehabilitation of the IDPs. On 11th November, 2014 Pakistan conducted 2nd donors conference for return and rehabilitation phase. The government requested for \$753 million (Rs 75.4 billion) for its return and rehabilitation agenda. The World Bank and European governments responded to the request by providing assistance of \$375 million. UK to provide assistance of \$150 million, World Bank to provide assistance of \$108 million where as Italy to provide assistance of \$76 but United States didn't provide any assistance to the IDPs.³⁴ It was expected that the US would announce aid for internally displaced in the third donors' conference. But the US ambassador to Pakistan Richard Olson did not commit any aid for displaced people. In the earlier meeting, "Olson had told Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dar that the US would disburse \$532 million to Pakistan under the Kerry-Lugar assistance package, of which \$250 million would be for the IDPs."³⁵ It seems the United States has come under unrelenting pressure from India over its monetary assistance to its ally, Pakistan. India wants the US to block all the assistance to Pakistan until and unless all those alleged terrorists are not punished who were the architects of the attacks on Indian soil.

Pakistan has to distribute assistance in various sectors of the devastated North Waziristan. The total assistance Pakistan asked for was Rs 75.4 billion. From this total amount "Islamabad wants to spend Rs 12.5 billion for cash disbursement, Rs 11.5 billion for rehabilitation costs, Rs 1.4 billion for transportation and Rs15 billion for compensation of damaged private property, Rs 5 billion for restoration of basic services and Rs 30 billion for reconstruction activities."³⁶ Moreover government of Pakistan also require Rs 35 billion for establishing a Counter Terrorism Task Force.

According to FATA Disaster Management Authority report, "damaged facilities sector-wise breakup is that total 31 educational institutions (six 100 percent, nine 50 percent and sixteen 20 percent), eight health facilities, two buildings of the works and services department, 13 facilities of livestock, seven

agriculture, eight public health engineering, 35 municipal committee including 21 shops, two sport facilities and 19 irrigation department have been damaged.”³⁷ Major issues which IDPs will face on return are:

- Insecurity
- Shortage of food
- Damage of property
- Ruined Infrastructure
- Unemployment
- Education
- Health facilities
- Psychological Problems

Insecurity

Return of the displaced people to their native towns will chiefly depend on the security situation of North Waziristan. “The military claims to have purged 90% area of militants, killing more than 2,000 militants in the process and dismantling their command and control centre and ammunition factories.”³⁸ Still 10% area is to be cleared and for that airstrikes are carried out from time to time. IDPs were glad when government announced return phase from 15th February 2015 because they stayed away from their hometowns for a long period. But on 27th January 2015 at least 76 suspected terrorists were killed in spanking new air strikes in North Waziristan Agency amidst Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif’s reiteration that the military would never abandon the tribal areas without restoring normalcy.³⁹ However, such promising statements give the IDPs strength to return despite the security apprehensions.

Shortage of Food

IDPs will face serious problems regarding shortage of food because markets have been destroyed. Standing crops have been ruined completely. And agricultural land must have been vandalised during operation.

Damage of Property

It is hard to assess the damages to property, when people will return they will experience traumatic environment as their houses would have been destroyed completely. There might not be clue to their property. Governor Sardar Mahtab told reporters that the government would compensate militancy-affected families. He said, Rs: 400, 000 would be paid for completely damaged house and Rs: 160, 000 for partial damages of house.⁴⁰ Now the actual question arise here, what mechanism would they apply in order to evaluate the complete and partial destruction?

Ruined Infrastructure

FATA administration has carried out damage need assessment survey of the government owned properties in Mirali and Miranshah sub-divisions of North Waziristan. The government's infrastructures worth one billion rupees have been turned into rubble in the conflict-stricken North Waziristan Agency where as private property survey has to be yet conducted.⁴¹

Unemployment

When IDPs will return they will face harsh reality of unemployment because of devastation of the area. Farmers suffer huge financial losses because their standing crops were destroyed during operation. Their fields were completely ruined which will take time to make it ready for cultivation. A survey was conducted by an NGO to see how IDPs were employed before operation Zarb-e-Azb. Locals work as daily wage labourers; they are also involved in agricultural crop production where as some work in public and private sector. Some are also supported by foreign remittances.

North Waziristan is one of the poorest and downtrodden areas of Pakistan. Now with the extreme devastation it will be challenging to find work on daily basis? Whereas agricultural land is ruined farmers will not be able to grow maize which is

a cash crop that provides livelihood to a vast majority of the affected areas. Prior when operation was conducted in Malakand region government decided to bar farmers from growing maize along roadside because the crops could provide shelter to the militants. Such decision was criticised by the farmers because what they believed was that it will multiply their financial woes.⁴² The same situation may happen in North Waziristan. Therefore people will not have work in the fields and they won't be able to support their families.

Education

Education has been the focal target of militants. "The Taliban in the region were vocal critics of the educational institutions, particularly against women education on so called religious pretexts."⁴³ Most of the educational institutes were destroyed by the militants. This will leave huge numbers without any means of education. Secondly not even a single government has paid much attention to education sector of FATA region. According to the education figures, until 2001 the annual expenditure on education in FATA region had been Rs: 1.5 billion. After the initiation of war on terror the education budget was nearly doubled to Rs: 2.7 billion. Education budget of FATA needs to be increased. This is a depressing situation, particularly for the marginalized communities and low income people. That is why literacy rate is low of that region i.e. "17.42 percent as compared to the 59.6 percent at federal and provincial levels altogether."⁴⁴

Health Facilities

As hospital buildings have been completely damaged and destroyed during operation, therefore people may not have access to emergency healthcare. Locals will need urgent dispensaries. Moreover there will be lack of female doctors and nurses which is an urgent requirement of the females.

Psychological Problems

Returnees may have psychological problems because on their return to their native areas, they will witness the destruction of their towns. This will lead to psychological problems in the community.

Recommendations

Below are some recommendations that how government of Pakistan with the help of INGOs and NGOs can duly respond to the IDPs crisis and how government can encourage voluntary returns.

- It is obligation upon the government of Pakistan to ensure sustainable security. People require assurance from the government that their security will be respected.
- Government of Pakistan must provide basic services i.e. shelter, sanitation, safe drinking water, cooked food etc to the IDPs of North Waziristan.
- Government of Pakistan must aid an organized and voluntary return of the displaced people because voluntary return is the right of the internally displaced people (IDPs).
- The government must have high esteem for the principle of voluntary returns. For instance displaced must be allowed if they want to prolong their stay in any of the adjacent districts, or relocate elsewhere in the country if they feel unsecure.
- It is obligation upon the government of Pakistan to help reconstruct markets, mosques, schools, hospitals, roads etc.
- It is obligation upon the government of Pakistan to compensate locals whose crops have vanished from the land, whose livestock has died or gone missing, whose shops have been robbed and destroyed and rest of the livelihoods.
- Developed countries in particular United States should help the Pakistani government in giving a reasonable

compensation package to the IDPs of North Waziristan. The compensation must be comprised of sufficient money to reconstruct damaged houses and people could start their livelihoods by starting some business or any other form of work which they were doing before operation.

- United States has been using drones for a long time. It should give suitable amount to the government of Pakistan to reconstruct schools, hospitals, police stations and roads.
- The Government of Pakistan must initiate micro finance banking to the IDPs. This will offer them opportunities in different sectors. This project will support farmers and small industries. They will be able to rehabilitate their cultivable land. Both men and women can benefit from it by having sustainable livelihood.
- International Non Government Organizations (INGOs) and Non Government Organizations (NGOs) must assist the government of Pakistan to help meet the needs of the displaced people. They may provide water, cash, cooking material, toilets and hygiene kits. They must establish number of distribution points to provide food to returning families.
- Beside FATA Disaster Management Assessment there should be assessment of damages by The World Bank and Asian Development Bank. This will make the donation process transparent and international community will donate more for reconstruction.
- The Emergency Response Unit (ERU) of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government must perform more efficiently.
- The Government should swiftly restore electricity and telecommunication system, water supply, irrigation channels, wells infrastructure requires repair as well.
- For reconstruction and repair locals must be hired in order to provide them short term employment.
- In the aftermath of operation the government of Pakistan must promote democratic institution building.

- As short term measure government of Pakistan with the help of humanitarian organizations must establish field hospitals and provide free medication.
- As long term measure FATA region requires economic development. So that people can get jobs easily in their area instead of going abroad for labour to earn their livelihood. It is one of the poorest regions with high unemployment and underdevelopment.
- North Waziristan requires excellent Hospitals for better health facilities so that locals don't feel any sort of discrimination.
- North Waziristan requires sufficient funds allocation for socio-economic uplift.
- The Government of Pakistan must increase education budget so that maximum students can benefit from education. It is a positive sign that federal government has announced scholarship scheme for the students of FATA region. Besides scholarships technical training has been launched by FATA Secretariat whereby eighty thousand students will be trained in different trades.
- Moreover the government should also provide security so that parents remain comfortable when they send their children to schools. As most of the children stopped going to school because of threats from militants.
- The National Disaster Response Plan (NDRP) requires up gradation in its efficiency to cope with all disasters.
- Most importantly by keeping health of children in consideration government of Pakistan must initiate polio campaign to eradicate polio from North Waziristan.

Conclusion

Operation Zarb-e-Azb was not the first of its kind in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) nor will it be the last one. Pakistan military will keep on conducting military operation to clear militants from Pakistan. And military continues to conduct operations till the normalcy returns to the FATA region. Operation Zarb-e-Azb had long been

expected due to terrorist activities even during peace talks, but still the government of Pakistan was ill prepared for humanitarian crisis. Government should have been prepared for every eventuality.

Pakistan has no plan to tackle large scale movement of civilians. The Government of Pakistan must map the needs of Internally Displaced Persons because large scale return of IDPs of North Waziristan will generate lot of challenges. Therefore pressing challenge is to craft such conditions which can sustain voluntary and durable returns. In prior IDPs situation, the Provincial Relief Commissioner, and a representative of UNHCR, endorsed a policy for returns i.e. returns should be voluntary, informed, dignified, safe and sustainable.

As according to government's plan IDPs return will take around one year to complete. Now the actual challenge for the government of Pakistan is to make relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts responsive to needs of local communities of North Waziristan. Failure to do so will overturn any gains on the battlefield and turn local community against the government of Pakistan. Moreover alienation will make them vulnerable to recruitment in militant camps. The area is entirely devastated in the operation. The displaced families of North Waziristan need immediate relief in the form of compensation for their damaged houses and other basic necessities for livelihood.

Notes

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