Pakistani Public Turns Against Taliban, But Still Negative on US

July 1, 2009

Most Pakistanis now see the Pakistani Taliban as well as al Qaeda as a critical threat to the country--a major shift from 18 months ago--and support the government and army in their fight in the Swat Valley against the Pakistani Taliban. An overwhelming majority think that Taliban groups who seek to overthrow the Afghan government should not be allowed to have bases in Pakistan.
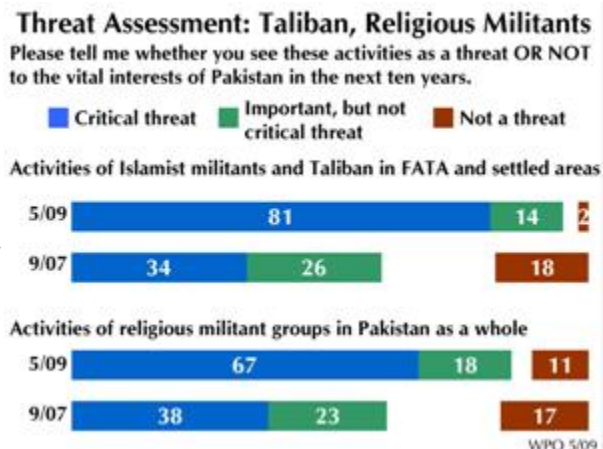
(Photo: [Al Jazeera English](#))

However, this does not bring with it a shift in attitudes toward the US. A large majority continue to have an unfavorable view of the US government. Almost two-thirds say they do not have confidence in Obama. An overwhelming majority opposes US drone attacks in Pakistan.

These are some of the results of a new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll conducted May 17-28, 2009. The nationwide random sample included 1000 Pakistani adults, selected using multi-stage probability sampling, who responded in face-to-face interviews. The margin of error is +/- 3.2 percent.

"A sea change has occurred in Pakistani public opinion. The tactics and undemocratic bent of militant groups--in tribal areas as well as Swat--have brought widespread revulsion and turned Pakistanis against them," comments Clay Ramsay, research director. However, he adds: "It's crucial to understand that the US is resented just as much as before, despite the US having a new president."

There has been a huge increase in those who think the "activities of Islamist militants and local Taliban" are a critical threat to Pakistan--a 47 point rise to 81 percent, up from 34 percent in late 2007. If the Pakistani Taliban were to gain control of the country, 75 percent say this would be bad (very bad, 67%)--though only 33 percent think this outcome is likely.

Seventy percent say their sympathies are more with the government than with the Pakistani Taliban in the struggle over Swat.

Threat Assessment: Taliban, Religious Militants

Please tell me whether you see these activities as a threat OR NOT to the vital interests of Pakistan in the next ten years.

- Critical threat
- Important, but not critical threat
- Not a threat

Activities of Islamist militants and Taliban in FATA and settled areas

	Critical threat	Important, but not critical threat	Not a threat
5/09	81	14	2
9/07	34	26	18

Activities of religious militant groups in Pakistan as a whole

	Critical threat	Important, but not critical threat	Not a threat
5/09	67	18	11
9/07	38	23	17

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Sympathies in Swat Conflict

Are your sympathies more with the government or more with the Pakistani Taliban?

More with government
70

Both/neither (vol.)
10

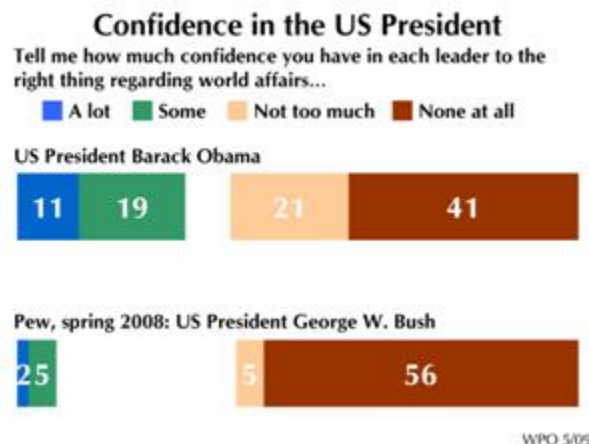More with Pakistani Taliban
5

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Large majorities express confidence in the government (69%) and the military (72%) to handle the situation. Retrospectively, the public leans (by 45% to 40%) toward thinking the government was right to try to make an agreement in which the Pakistani Taliban would shut down its camps and turn in its heavy weapons in return for a shari'a court system in Swat. But now 67 percent think the Pakistani Taliban violated the agreement when it sent its forces into more areas, and 63 percent think the people of Swat disapprove of the agreement.

On the Afghan Taliban, an overwhelming 87 percent think that groups fighting to overthrow the Afghan government should not be allowed to have bases in Pakistan. Most (77%) do not believe the Afghan Taliban has bases in Pakistan. However, if Pakistan's government were to identify such bases in the country, three in four (78%) think it should close the bases even if it requires using military force.

Public attitudes toward al Qaeda training camps follow the same pattern. Those saying the "activities of al Qaeda" are a critical threat to Pakistan are up 41 points to 82 percent. Almost all (88%) think al Qaeda should not be allowed to operate training camps in Pakistan. Though 76 percent do not believe there are such camps, if the Pakistani government were to identify them, 74 percent say the government should close them, with force if necessary.

This striking new public willingness to see the government directly oppose Taliban groups and al Qaeda owes little or nothing to an "Obama effect." A 62 percent majority expresses low confidence in President Obama to do the right thing in world affairs (none at all, 41%). Only one in three (32%) think his policies will be better for Pakistan; 62 percent think they will be about the same (26%) or worse (36%).

Views of the US remain overwhelmingly negative. Sixty-nine percent have an unfavorable view of the current US government (58% very unfavorable)-- essentially the same as in 2008. Eighty-eight percent think it is a US goal to weaken and divide the Islamic world (78% definitely a goal). The US Predator drone attacks aimed at militant camps within the Pakistani border are rejected by 82 percent as unjustified. On the war in Afghanistan, 72 percent disapprove of the NATO mission and 79 percent want it ended now; 86 percent think most Afghans want the mission ended as well.

Asked about the nation's leaders, a large majority--68 percent--views President Zardari unfavorably (very, 50%), but--unlike the recent past--there are multiple national leaders whom most do view favorably. Prime Minister Gilani is seems untarred by negative views of Zardari and gets favorable ratings from 80 percent of Pakistanis. The restored Chief Justice Chaudry is very popular (82%), and opposition leader Nawaz Sharif is extremely popular (87%). The leader most associated with the Pakistani Taliban, Maulana Sufi Mohammad, is viewed positively by only 18 percent of Pakistanis.