

Factors Behind the Growing Sectarian Violence in the Newly Tribal District Kurram of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan, Since 9/11 (2001)

Mr. Sharif Khan¹, Dr. Zafar Khan² and Dr. Rahman Ullah³

Abstract

Various socio-economic and political factors spur the sectarian violence in Pakistan. This research study investigates factors behind the growing sectarian violence in the wake of war against terror in the tribal belt of Pakistan. The main purpose of this research paper is to know the relationship between terrorism and sectarian violence after US led war on terror. Various local and trans-national terrorist groups have fueled the local sectarianism for their own interest. Terrorists' organization have encouraged and motivated local people for sectarian clashes, which have destroyed the bond of unity between the local sects which were existed before new wave of terrorism. The current wave of sectarian violence cannot be controlled without eradication of terrorism of this region.

Key words: Sectarian Violence; Trans-national Terrorism; War on Terror; Safe Sanctuaries

Introduction

Pakistan has been facing the serious issue of sectarian violence since the time of its creation (Saikal, 2001). Along with other sect, the two opposite groups the Sunnis⁴ and Shias⁵ have been fighting against one another. Both the sects claim that their religion is right and superior to one another (Shah, 2014). This ideological conflict has been converted the religion of peace into radicalism and extremism (Murphy & Malik, 2009). Now the two opponents' sects believe that killing of one another is a service to the religion. Islam is the religion of peace and love which does

¹ Ph.D Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar

² Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College Peshawar

⁴ Sunni, One of the two main branches of Islam commonly described as orthodox, and differing from Shia in its understanding of the Sunni and its acceptance of the first three caliphs.

⁵ Shia, One of the two main branches of Islam followed by about tenth of Muslims, especially in Iran, that rejects the first three caliphs regard Ali, the fourth caliph as Muhammad's first true successor.

not believe to kill one another on the basis sects. However, religious teaching of Islam in Pakistan in general and the newly tribal district of Khyber is particularly misinterpreted by different sect-based organizations and terrorist groups for their own vested interest (Nasr, 2002). For this purpose, various social, cultural, political factors have been used to instigate sectarian conflict in the newly tribal district in general and district Kurram is particular.

However, US led war against terror has further instigated sectarian violence. After the 9/11 various local and trans-national terrorist groups have been involved to escalate the problem of sectarianism in newly tribal district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The militants' groups entered into district Kurram in order to fuel the prevailing clashes between Shia and Sunni groups (Tasneem, 2013). The trans-national terrorist organization such as Al-Qaeda, Tehreek Taliban Pakistan one have been spending large sum of money in tribal district of Pakistan to get local support.

They have exploited decades old sectarian conflict and usually attacked Shias tribes in the area (Yusuf, 2012). Al Qaida is also supporting local Sunni groups for anti-Shia activities (Yamin, 2008). Moreover, terrorists have also utilized sectarian organizations for their own vested interests, especially the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and *Lashkar-e- Jhangvi* (LeJ) to accelerate anti-Shia violence. The South Asian terrorism portal indicated that there were 631 sectarian violence incidents in district Kurram from 2007 to 2011 (Munir, et al., 2012). These incidents have been resulted the deaths of 1,649 people (Abbasi, 2013). In the year of 2010, many incidents occurred, in total 57 incidents 509 people were killed and 1, 170 people were injured. In the next year 2011 the sectarian violence decreased, 203 were killed and 297 were injured in 30 incidents. The above-mentioned statistics shows that after the emergence of war on terror, sectarian violence has been increasing day by day generally in Pakistan and particularly in district Kurram (Ahmed, 2011; Jones, 2008).

The current study is focused on to explore the impact of new waves of terrorism on sectarian violence in the newly tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study explores the causative factors of sectarian violence in the backdrop of war on terror. It also explored that how sectarianism exploited by the terrorist groups.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the impact of new wave of terrorism on sectarian violence;
2. To investigate the new trend of sectarian violence after the war on terror;

3. To suggest the policy recommendations in the light of present study.

Research Questions

1. How the present day terrorism fuels sectarian violence in district kurram?
2. How the terrorist organizations are getting support of the local community?
3. What kinds of changes occur in sectarian violence in district Kurram in the War on terror?

Literature Review

Historically, District Kurram is considered as a battle ground for sectarian violence. Different internal and external forces have promoted sectarian clashes in the areas. Since 1979, the migration of Afghanis Refugees to newly tribal district Kurram who brought Deobandi ideology, which further encouraged sectarian violence in the region (Wirsing, 1998). After the immigration of Afghanis into district Kurram, they started intervention between Shia and Sunnis conflicts. Beside to this, Afghan's Taliban forces have been also supporting local Sunni tribes, particularly the Bangash tribe in their inter-sect disputes with the local Shia Community (Lian, 2010).

Along with the Soviet-Afghan war the foreign intervention also fueled sectarianism in this region. For instigating sectarianism, the role of Saudi Arabia and Iran has always remained controversial (Nawaz & De Borchgrave, 2009; Waseem, et al., 2010). The proxy war of sectarianism in District Kurrma has created many socio-economic troubles for the innocent citizens. In addition to this, many people have also lost their lives in a constant war of sectarianism in the tribal district Kurram of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Begum, 2012).

New Waves of Sectarian Violence in the Backdrop of 9/11

As mentioned earlier that war against terror is one of the most important factors to increase sectarian conflicts in the district Kurram. Since 9/11, there is a new trend towards sectarian violence in this region (Akhtar, 2008). After US led war on terror many terrorist groups find sanctuaries in this region. They have instigated sectarian conflict for their own vested interest (Hilali, 2013). Relatively, peaceful ties between the major two sects have been converted into hostile relation after 9/11 (Rumi, 2012).

The US led war on terror has escalated target killing among the two opponent sects. Different terrorist groups from both of the sides have been targeting the religious leaders, intellectuals, doctors from each other (Williams, 2008). Shias claim that Taliban target us and Sunni claim shias militant organization target (Abbas,

2010). Moreover, Sunnis community also claim that Mehdi Militias and Hezbollah, the Shia terrorist groups get training in Iran and Iraq, after getting training they are sent to Pakistan and its tribal areas to fight against the Sunni sect. Resultantly, district Kurram become the epicenter for sectarian violence (Tellis, 2008). Therefore, district Kurram is considered the most affected area of sectarian violence. The terrorist groups have exploited local sectarian conflict for their vested interest.

Methodology of the Study

Research methodology is considered one of the most important part of scientific enquiry (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Keeping in view the objectives and nature of the study, quantitative research paradigm was used for the completion of this research study. The data was collected with the help of questionnaire and interview schedule. Furthermore, primary data is supported with secondary data to draw a clear picture about the issue in hand.

Universe of the Study

The study is conducted in newly tribal district Kurram of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The two different sects (Shia and Sunni) have been living for many decades in this region. The US led war on terror has further intensified Shia and Sunni conflict in District Kurram. Terrorist groups have exploited decades old sectarian violence for their own vested interests. The trans-national terrorism has also motivated the local sectarian organizations for their own vested interests (Jaspal, 2010). It shows justification of the study universe.

Sampling and Sample Size

The data was collected from *Maliks* of the study universe, who have enough knowledge about the subject under study by virtue of their knowledge and wisdom as Jirga members. For covering the total population *Maliks* of the study universe is 1016 (Governor Secretariat FATA, Peshawar, 2016). Therefore, a suitable sample size of 280 was selected on the basis of Sekaran table formula. All the respondents were selected randomly with the help of proportional allocation method by using the criteria for the determination of sample size given by (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

Tools of Data Collection

Structured questionnaire/interview schedule was used for the collection of data. Structured Questionnaire was used for educated respondents while the same questionnaire was used as interview schedule in case of uneducated respondents.

Data Analysis

The collected informations were analyzed with the help of SPSS-20 version (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences). To draw frequencies and percentages information, Uni-variate analysis was carried out. Furthermore, Chi Square test was used at Bi-variate level for knowing about the association between independent variable (Terrorism, external hands, religious conspiracy and politicization) and dependent variable (Sectarianism)

Data Analysis and Results Discussions

An Association between Terrorism and Sectarian Violence after 9/11

S. #	Statement	Response	Terrorism is an escalating factor of sectarian violence			Total	Statistics
			Yes	No	Uncertain		
1	Sect based violence links with the current terrorism in the area	Yes	110 (39.3%)	20 (7.1%)	29 (10.4%)	159(56.8)	$\chi^2 = 24.80$ $P = 0.000$
		No	47 (16.8%)	37(13.2%)	14 (5.0%)	98(35.0%)	
		Uncertain	11 (3.9%)	9 (3.2%)	3 (1.1%)	23 (8.2%)	
		Total	168 (60.0%)	66 (23.6%)	46 (16.4%)	280(100%)	
2	Terrorists exploit sectarian	Yes	114 (40.7%)	19 (6.8%)	35(12.5%)	168 (60.0%)	$\chi^2 = 36.13$ $P = 0.000$

	violence	No	38 (13.6%)	34 (12.1%)	8 (2.9%)	80 (28.6%)	
		Uncertain	16 (5.7%)	13 (4.6%)	3 (1.1%)	32 (11.4%)	
		Total	168 (60.0%)	66 (23.6%)	46(16.6%)	280 (100%)	
3	Local people perceptions about sectarian violence after 9/11	Yes	81 (28.9%)	50 (17.9%)	20 (7.1%)	151 (53.9%)	X²=22.18 P =.000
		No	80 (28.6%)	14 (5.0%)	20 (7.1%)	114 (40.7%)	
		Uncertain	7 (2.5%)	2 (0.7%)	6 (2.1%)	15 (5.4%)	
		Total	168 (60.0%)	66 (23.6%)	46(16.4%)	280 (100%)	
4	Terrorist sanctuaries impact on local sectarian violence in this region	Yes	107 (38.2%)	23 (8.2%)	32(11.4%)	162 (57.9%)	X²=21.30 P =0.000
		No	44 (15.7%)	33 (11.8%)	13 (4.6%)	90 (32.1%)	
		Uncertain	17 (6.1%)	10 (3.6%)	1 (0.4%)	28 (10.0%)	

)	
		Total	168 (60.0%)	66 (23.6%)	46(16.4 %)	280 (100%)	
5	Sectarianism exploitation by terrorist organization for their vested	Yes	87 (31.1%)	17 (6.1%)	32(11.4 %)	136 (48.6%)	X²=23.49 P =0.000
		No	69 (24.6%)	44 (15.7%)	13 (4.6%)	126 (45.0%)	
		Uncertain	12 (4.3%)	5 (1.8%)	1 (0.4%)	18 (6.4%)	
		Total	168 (60.0%)	66 (23.6%)	46(16.4 %)	280 (100%)	
6	Terrorists support to local sects to fuel sectarianism	Yes	123 (43.9%)	25 (8.9%)	36(12.9 %)	184(65.7%)	X²=32.04 P =0.000
		No	43 (15.4%)	38 (13.6%)	8 (2.9%)	89 (31.8%)	
		Uncertain	2 (0.7%)	3 (1.1%)	2 (0.7%)	7 (2.5%)	
		Total	168 (60.0%)	66 (23.6%)	46(16.4 %)	280 (100%)	

Hostility among the Local Sects after 9/11

Terrorism has further instigated the local sectarian violence in this region. The above table shows that there is an association between terrorism and sectarian violence. Sectarian violence has been increased in the newly tribal district Kurram after US led war on terror. The current research study has found close links between terrorism and sectarian violence. It was found that there is highly significant ($p=0.000$) association between terrorism and sectarian violence. According to Ahmar, 2010 that trans-national terrorism is considered an escalating factor of sectarian violence in Pakistan. Since 9/11, various local and trans-national terrorist groups have been instigated sectarian violence generally in Pakistan and particularly in district Kurram.

Moreover, significant ($p=0.000$) association was found between the terrorists exploitation of local sect. It is argued that terrorist often exploit local conflicts for their own interest (Karmon (2007) It is revealed that incidents of sectarian violence have been increased after new wave of terrorism in this region. People attitudes regarding sectarian violence are more rigid and violent as compare to pre-9/11. After 9/11 the presence of the terrorist groups in the tribal areas has fueled sectarian violence (Wazir, 2014). The militant groups entered into this region especially to North and South Waziristan and Kurram. Their entrance instigated sectarian violence (Kellner, 2004).

Furthermore, a highly significant ($p=0.000$) association was found between the sanctuaries of terrorist groups in this region and sectarian violence. Terrorism has further ignited relationships between Sunnis and Shias sects. Several terrorist groups have taken safe havens and sanctuaries in the tribal areas of Pakistan (Johnson and Mason, 2008). These terrorist groups have been taking parts in Shia and Sunni conflict to increase sectarian violence in the area. Since 2006, the Taliban fighters in district Kurram instigated the decade's old sectarian tension. They have been targeting the Shias sect in the area. Therefore, the existing of safe havens of terrorist groups in this region has increased sectarian violence unexpectedly (Yusuf, 2012).

Different terrorist groups have used sectarianism as a tool for their organizational interests. Al-Qaeda has utilized sect-based organizations for their own vested interests especially, Sipah Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) to accelerate anti Shia violence (Zahab, 2002). Resultantly, motivation and encouragement of a particular group by terrorists in the area has increased sectarian violence. Taliban forces have been supporting local Sunni tribes of the District Kurram, particularly the Bangash tribe in their inter-sect disputes with the local Shia

groups (Lian, 2010). They fought largely on the side of Sunnis in Kurram. The Taliban support has further instigated the local sectarian conflicts in the region.

Conclusion

This study is mainly focused on the sectarian violence on District Kurram after the war against terror. It is concluded that sectarian violence has been increased after the war on terror in this region. The current study revealed that various terrorist groups have safe havens in the newly tribal district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after US led war on terror. In this region the terrorist groups have developed links with the local sect-based organizations. The presence of these terrorists group instigated the local sectarian clashes for their vested interests. The local sects become more violent as compared to pre-9/11. Major findings of the existing study revealed that different local and trans-national terrorists' groups have used sectarianism as a tool for their own interests. Terrorists have encouraged and motivated local people for sectarian violence in district Kurram.

Reference

- Abbasi, N. M. (2013). Impact of Terrorism on Pakistan. *Strategic Studies*, 33(2), 21-24.
- Ahmed, K. (2011). *Sectarian War: Pakistan's Sunni-Shia violence and its links to the Middle East*. Oxford University Press.
- Abbas, H. (2010). *Shiism and Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: Identity Politics, Iranian Influence, and Tit-for-Tat Violence*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.
- Akhtar, N. (2008). Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban. *International Journal on World Peace*, 29-33.
- Begum, I. (2012). Sectarian Strife in Pakistan: A Legacy of Nineteen Eighties. *Pakistan Perspectives*, 17, (2), 29.
- Dressler, J., & Jan, R. (2011). The Haqqani Network in Kurram. *Institute for the Study of War and American Enterprise Institute*.
- Hilali, A. Z. (2013). Contemporary Geopolitics of FATA: An Analysis of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 26(4), 29.

- Jones, S. G. (2008). The rise of Afghanistan's insurgency: State failure and Jihad. *International Security*, 32, (4), 7-9.
- Lian, W. A. N. G. (2010). Talibanization in the tribal areas of Pakistan. *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 4, 1.
- Munir, M., Ali, S. R. Muhammad, N. Shah, M, (2012). Terrorism: An Evaluation of Students' Awareness and Attitude at Kust, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, 120.
- Murphy, E., & Malik, A. R. (2009). Pakistan Jihad: the making of religious terrorism. *IPRI Journal*, 1(2), 23.
- Nasr, S. V. R. (2002). Islam, the state and the rise of sectarian militancy in Pakistan. *Pakistan: Nationalism without a nation*, 53-55.
- Nawaz, S., & De Borchgrave, A. (2009). FATA- A most dangerous place. *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 17.
- Rumi, R. a. (2012). "Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Regional Perspective". *CIDOB Policy Research Project*.
- Saikal, A. (2001). Iran's Turbulent Neighbor: The Challenge of the Taliban. *Global Dialogue*, 3, 2, 97.
- Shah, M. N. (2014). Evolution of Sectarianism in Pakistan: A Threat to the State and Society. *South Asian Studies*, 29, (2), 119.
- Steenkamp, J. B. E., Hofstede, F. T., & Wedel, M. (2003). A cross-national investigation into the individual and national cultural antecedents of consumer
- Tasneem, N. (2013). Violent Conflict and Prospects of Economic Growth in Pakistan. *International Research Journal of Finance and Economics*, 7, (5), 57-60.
- Tellis, A. J. (2008). Pakistan and the War on Terror. *Conflicted Goals, Compromised Performance*. Washington, DC: *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 13.
- Waseem, M., Kamran, T., Ali, M. A., & Riikonen, K. (2010). Dilemmas of pride and pain: Sectarian conflict and conflict transformation in Pakistan.

- Williams, B. G. (2008). Talibanistan: History of a transnational terrorist sanctuary. *Civil Wars*, 10, (1), 14-15.
- Wirsing, R. G. (1998). Pakistan and the War in Afghanistan. *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 14, (2), 51-54.
- Yamin, S. (2008). Understanding religious identity and the causes of religious violence. *Peace Prints: South Asian Journal of Peace building*, 1 (1), 1-21.
- Yusuf, H. (2012). Sectarian Violence: Pakistan's greatest security threat. *Norwegian Peace Building Resource Center*.
- Zahab, M. A. (2002). The regional dimension of sectarian conflict in Pakistan: *Nationalism without a nation*, 5, 118-121.