

War on Terror and Pakistan's Policies towards Militancy

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Abstract

The weak border between Afghanistan and Pakistan and old administrative structure in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (generally called FATA or shortly tribal areas), made this region a hub of international militant organizations during the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s. After the 9/11, the tribal areas remained the focus of world attention for the security threat to the world in general and the region in particular. To make the rest of the country more secure, Pakistan army launched military operations against the foreign militants in the tribal areas. The government then struck peace agreements with them in the following years as well as the military operations continued in different parts of FATA against militants. National Action Plan (NAP) was the final step towards combating militancy. This paper examines the questions: which policy of the government was successful in countering militancy in the tribal areas as well as in the country? Was a comprehensive policy needed to fight against militancy in the country? Primary and secondary sources are incorporated in methodology.

Key words: FATA, Militancy, 9/11, Peace Agreements, Military operations

Introduction

Pakistan joined the War on Terror with the US and its coalition forces against Al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan after the dreadful events of 9/11. Before the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, most of the tribal areas were in a deep restive position. After the Afghan war in 1980's, most of the Islamists quit the areas and went to their respective states but some decided to stay here. The relationships between the tribal people and the foreign guests were very cordial and it was strengthened more with the matrimonial relation between them. They were now part of that tribal society and traditional culture. After the Soviet-Afghan war, there never remained any law and order situation in the tribal areas. Traditionally and religiously, Pakthun were influenced mostly by the religious leaders in their social and political life. The political and religious ideology of those "Guests" now became the part of their society influenced by them with the passage of time unnoticed by anyone in the areas. It was evident

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from the past history that the Pakhtun always supported the movements which were started in the name of Islam and for the supremacy of it.

They (Pakhtun) poured all their resources in the name of Allah (for the holy cause) and Islam without thinking of any worldly benefits (material benefits as we have seen in the Soviet Afghan war in the 1980s). The case of Arab and other foreign fighters was the same. They gave them not only shelter but put them in high esteem and followed them in their preaching. They were considered as hero of Islam and the fighters for the cause of Islam. Interestingly, these foreign guests only selected the tribal areas of Pakistan for their living and not the other parts of the country because of the nature of the environment. The government on all these developments in the region of the foreign elements was aware but no action against them was taken and their presence in the tribal areas and even not notice the changes of the relationship between the militants and the tribal peoples.

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas, generally called FATA or tribal areas of Pakistan, consist of seven Agencies and six Frontier Regions (FR). It has an approximately 10,500 sq. miles of area as roughly the size of the State of Maryland and share three hundred miles of border with Afghanistan. The international boundary between Afghanistan and the British India was demarcated in 1893 with the name of Durand Line. This demarcation was considered as the “Great Game” policy between the British and Russian Empire to safeguard their respective territories from encroachment by making Afghanistan as the “Buffer State.”

This boundary line physically divided the Pakhtun population but it did not affect its ethnic and family connection on both sides of the border. The weak physical position of the border and the strong ethnic and family relations of the Pakhtun never deter them to cross it any time, even in the war times. They consider it an identification mark and not a border as in the territorial context of two sovereign countries. Sometimes, the herds enter the border leaving the herd keeper on the other side of the border. Sometimes, the herd keeper sits in the shadow of a tree while the herds go to the opposite side for grazing. Boys playing on the one side, sometimes cross the border in playing games and no botheration for the border managers for their crossing the border. The marriage ceremonies take place across the border and the relatives attend the ceremony without any hesitation while crossing the other side of border.

The people of FATA, from the time immemorial, have lived independently and have never allowed any external power to subject them militarily. This was the internal spirit of their freedom that they want to live without any external authority. But the British imperialist formulated certain laws and methods which helped them to control this difficult terrain through some

inhuman laws. The Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) of 1901, a British colonial era set of laws, which is instrumental in governing the area. Under the FCR, the FATA has different set of administration different from the rest of Pakistan (Kerr, 2010).¹

The Colonial era administrative structure in the tribal areas run by the Political Agents (PA) and Assistant Political Agents (APA) have denied basic constitutional rights, political enfranchisement and the reign of a formal legal and economic system. Thus, the result is extreme poverty among the masses, alienation of the tribal people and the lawlessness in the whole regions that provides both sanctuaries and ideal breeding grounds for militant groups (ICG, 2012).²

The laws of Pakistan are not applied here and Parliament cannot make legislation for the tribal areas in spite of the fact that the tribal areas have representatives in both Houses of the Parliament. Till 1996, political activities were not allowed in FATA and the members of Parliament were elected by the Maliks who enjoyed the right to votes. There is still no local government system with elections for local bodies throughout the history. It is because of no political activities that the role of other non-state actors has increased and they have dominated the masses in the tribal areas. A survey conducted in FATA revealed that 94 percent of the respondents were not satisfied with the current administration setup in FATA (FATA Research Centre, 2012).³

Militancy in FATA

The volatile situation in Afghanistan has direct effect on Pakistan, in general, and on FATA and NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-KP) in particular in the last thirty years of development in the grooming of militant organizations. These organizations have developed connection among themselves for a global cause i.e., the Islamic Sharia in Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries. The Islamic order that was established in Afghanistan provided a 'Role Model' for a theocratic state in which the Sharia would be enforced along the puritanical lines of the Deobandi School of Thought. The Sunni militants dreamed the Talibanization of Pakistan in the foreseeable future (Talbot, 2007).⁴

When Taliban and Al Qaeda were defeated in Afghanistan, their cadres then moved across the highly porous Afghanistan-Pakistan border into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where they took advantage of the utterly hostile topography, the old tribal tradition of hospitality to strangers, and the absence of a strong Pakistani state presence (Tellis, 2009).⁵ The withdrawal of the Afghan Taliban from Afghanistan into the tribal areas of Pakistan, and the mobilization of Pakistani Pakhtun in support of them led the US to demand

Pakistan of launching what became in effect a civil war on its own soil (Lieven, 2011).⁶ This has turned the tribal areas more insecure and violent as the entry of Taliban and Al Qaeda militants brought the war into Pakistan's tribal areas from Afghanistan.

The reorganization of the Taliban in FATA enabled Al-Qaeda to re-establish a base area and pursue its role in providing training and financing to its global affiliates (Rashid, 2008).⁷ According to an academician, "Pakistan and Afghanistan are linked together in peace and vice versa. Historically, there are sympathizers of Taliban in FATA and thus they establish their networks there and became a hub of all militants in the region" (Ayaz, 2013).⁸

In an another interview, "after the US attack on Afghanistan, most of the militants left Afghanistan for tribal areas and in hot pursuit, the US chased those militants and thus the war zone expanded into Pakistan tribal areas" (Sattar, 2013).⁹ Using modern means of communication, shared ideology helps connected the fragmented, dispersed, isolated or informally interlink elements of modern networks (Stepanova, 2008).¹⁰

After the 9/11 event and the US attack on Afghanistan, those fighters (Taliban and Arabs) left Afghanistan and came to FATA and stayed here, as it was not a refugee for them because they have no care or importance to the Durand Line. The host tribes welcomed them and provided shelter to them in their areas as not knowing or considering that it is a violation of state's laws and challenged the writ of the state. They give more importance to their code of social life, hospitality and shelter than to the laws of the state. This is due to the weak structure of the administration.

The Al-Qaeda, operating from the border land, managed to transform and replenish itself with new recruits from among the Pakistani militant groups. This enabled the group in survival from capturing and killing of many its senior operatives. Founding members, mostly from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Libya, known as Sheikhs, continued to provide ideological leadership, but the rank and file of the network increasingly comprised of the new militants from Pakistan and other countries including Somalia, Turkey, Indonesia and Bangladesh who managed to ship into the border region (Hussain, 2011).¹¹ A scholar explained the situation in the tribal areas thus: "The tribal system is based on revenge against the enemy and Taliban insurgency should also be seen in that perspective in mind" (Ahmad, 2014).¹²

A scholar in an interview said, "There was confusion in the military how to deal with the militants in the tribal areas. They have not adopted such policies which could restrict this war limited to the border and this had created problems in Pakistan" (Jaspal, 2013).¹³ An insurgency broke out against US-Pakistan against

the attempts to root out the Taliban fighters that took refuge in tribal areas after the US invaded Afghanistan. A “war economy” has persisted in the border areas, sustaining training camps and fighters. Militants established their writ in the areas and challenged the state authority openly. The Taliban leaders issued declarations about what is “Islamic” and used these to legitimize their attacks on internal and external claimants to their authority. These acts helped to consolidate their control within specific territory and to ward off outsiders who try to intervene. FATA has become “the most armed and militant region where the writ of the state appears almost non-existent” (Hussain, 2007).¹⁴

Terrorism in Pakistan

The US asked Musharraf to take action against the Al Qaeda and Taliban remnants in the tribal areas and he promised to flush them out from the hide outs. This policy of arrest and attacks against the militants was not planned properly while not keeping the tribal structure and the tribal norms in mind and the prevailing situation at that time. When the search operation was started in the tribal areas, core leadership shifted to other cities of Pakistan where they had ideological sympathizers and no problems in hiding there. During search operations, many foreign militants were killed and captured but still they were active as their network could not be fully dismantled.

Pakistan finds itself with a number of difficulties in trying to track down Al Qaeda. The rise in anti-American sentiments, the presence of Al Qaeda militants, embedded with the local tribes, the difficult mountain terrain and a lack of real time intelligence and equipment, night vision kit and attack helicopters, for rapid response all play a part in failing to apprehend these militants (Samad, 2011).¹⁵

The more Islamabad aligned itself with the United States, the more the young members of militant organizations turned inwards to target the military. The Karachi based Jundullah (Army of God) was a prime example of the changing face of Al-Qaeda in Pakistan. The emergence of groups like Jundullah showed how new jihadi cells were quickly formed after others were wounded up. The rise of small terrorist cells made the task of containing them harder. These terrorist groups multiplied with the escalation of Pakistani military offensive in the northwest and tribal regions. Some of these groups had just four or five members making them hard to detect (Hussain, 2011).¹⁶

Military Operations and Peace Agreements-Approaches towards Militancy

The decision of military operation in a specific area to capture foreign militants was a fatal mistake. Initially, it was considered to be a short operation

with limited resources and efforts to gain the desired results but unaware of the ground reality in the tribal areas, the crackdown caused heavy sufferings to the security forces of Pakistan in the proceedings years of operations in different parts of tribal areas.

The Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) launched in Afghanistan against Taliban and Al Qaeda was now directed against them in the tribal areas and the rest of Pakistan. The Pakistan Army and intelligence agencies took several operations and captured hundreds of Al Qaeda militants and leaders in tribal areas as well as in other parts of the country. The American administration supported Pakistan's efforts and acknowledged its services in handing over of top Al Qaeda leaders in search operations. Meantime, the Taliban leaders and militants got sidelined in the movement because the whole concentration was on the Al Qaeda militants. This policy strengthened the Taliban network in the main cities with other militant organizations and established network throughout the country.

According to an analyst, the militancy did not spread to other parts of country rather the militants came to the tribal areas from different parts of the country because of the administrative vacuum in FATA. The main reason of this was the banning of many militant organizations by the Musharraf government. Those organizations established their camps in the tribal areas with full support of the Al Qaeda and Taliban. Foreign militants along with the local militants used specific parts of tribal areas for their activities (Khan, 2013).¹⁷

Pakistan's policy of military operation against the foreign militants was not prepared according to the ground realities because those militants were given shelter by the local people, according to their own culture and traditions, likewise, the government did not consult the political administration on this issue to get support of the masses from these areas. Therefore, when the military operation started people not only supported the militants but also stood against the security forces whom was the sole and main reason of the latter's failure.

In December 2003, the then Governor NWFP Safdar Mahmood announced amnesty for those foreigners who voluntarily surrender themselves to the government with the promise to allow them to live in the Agency in accordance with the tribal customs. In March 2004, the Army started another operation in South Waziristan Agency against the foreign militants and their local 72 Ahmedzai Wazir tribesmen allies. The March 2004, Kalosha operation was spread over 50 sq. kilometers areas near Wana, the district headquarters, around some villages which were under the control of five Islamist militants, all had links with Afghan Taliban too. The operation led to backfired, heavy losses to the forces and many of them became hostages (ICG, 2006).¹⁸

“The entry of Army intervention has disturbed the whole structure of the political administration of tribal areas and dismantled the civil institutions there. The Frontier Constabulary (FC) was the best option in FATA which should be strengthened instead of deploying regular army unit deployment” (Shah, 2013).¹⁹

An agreement was struck between the government and the local militants in Shakai, the stronghold of local Taliban Commander Nek Mohammad. ‘The Shakai Peace Agreement’ gave local Taliban free hand and financial support in return for their renouncing violence. It was asked from the militants to handover Al Qaeda and other militant or registered them with the government and make sure that they would not use the Pakistani territory for attack in Afghanistan (ICG, 2006).²⁰

This agreement in the first attempt recognized the power and status of the militants in the tribal areas and this was the first agreement between the government and the local militants in which the militants were given a status of powerful element which can challenge writ of the state in future. The political administration as well as the tribal Maliks and elders were gone in back and marginalized in due time of the events. This has weakened their position as more violent activities were coming. Three years of military campaign has not only failed to eliminate the foreign militants but also strengthened the tribal Taliban (Grare, 2006).²¹

From 2004 to 2006, the government signed various agreements with the local Taliban faction in the tribal areas. The Shakai Peace Agreement with Ahmadzai Wazir (April 2004) strengthened the position of militants. In June, 2004, a US drone missile killed Nek Mohammad. A new agreement was made but it was also broken within few months. Again a military operation was started against the local militants, this time Baitullah Mahsud resisted the forces and in an ambush he arrested dozens of soldiers taking part in the operation. This was an embarrassment for the government and again a new agreement was made in Sararogha between Baithullah Mahsud and the Army in February 2005. Baithullah signed an agreement and guaranteed to remain loyal to Pakistan. In the agreement, the militants would not attack on the government officials, not gave space and support to Al Qaeda and other militants but would support the government’s policy regarding war on terror (ICG, 2006).²²

In September 2006, the government and the local Taliban reached another agreement with the Uthmanzai Wazir tribe through which the government would “stop air and ground operations” against the militants, release all the militants arrested during the operations and not to arrest any one of them in the past event. It had undermined the government writ and strengthened the militants. These fierce young squads with heavy weapons marching from one place to the other,

enforcing their own view of Islam on the gun points, proliferated to other parts of the country.

None of these agreements long lasted. These agreements gave new spirit to the militants and put their activities in more robust manner. After every agreement, the writ of the state got limited and that of the militants expanded. They, thus became a factor in the stability of the area and all this was done with the poor policies applied to the tribal areas. The peace agreements were signed in an attempt to make peace in the country for short time but permanent solution was far behind of these government efforts. The state of was aware of the repercussions of such development in the long run.

Such deals expanded the political sphere of Islamists without producing peace, effectively providing them a sphere of influence not only in the tribal areas but also in certain settled districts of NWFP particularly the district of Swat (ICG, 2009).²³ With all these developments in the tribal areas, the militants now openly interfered by establishing a parallel administration in the North and South Waziristan Agencies. They attacked the music shops, videos and CD stores, and closed barber shops. They established a parallel system of Justice in the areas under their control meaning that the old system of Jirga was discarded. The role of Malik was minimized and the militants got prominent position in the affairs of the tribal areas. Now they are spreading their influence to other parts of the agencies and thus the process of Talibanization started in the tribal areas as well as in the settled areas of NWFP.

In the Bajaur Agency, the militants threatened the NGO workers and stopped them from working there. In Khyber Agency, the Laskhar-e-Islam (LI) instructed the people to pray five times, grow beard, put caps on their heads, stop music in the vehicles and not to shave beard. For all these activities, the militants used the unauthorized FM radio stations which were a powerful instrument in their hands for propagating ideology and threaten the opponents.

The militancy or Talibanization was initially limited to the North and South Waziristan Agencies. It was spread to Bajaur Agency which was previously a peaceful area but a trend of militancy started there. Other areas such as Mohmand, Orakzai, and Kurram Agencies as well as the settled areas of Bannu, Laki Marwat, Tank, Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan were came under the influence of militant networks (Jones & Fair, 2010).²⁴

Thousands of tribal Maliks were killed or driven out by the militants, a new force of Taliban militants emerged to fill the vacuum created by those Maliks and administrative system in Federally Administrative Tribal Areas (FATA). The peace agreement of the government with the militants not only gave them

breathing space in the tribal areas but also provided them an opportunity to recruit many young people in their organizations.

The writ of the state and that of the local administration got paralyzed in the tribal areas by 2006-2007. More than 500 elders and pro-government Maliks were killed brutally in the tribal areas and hundreds of them shifted to Peshawar and Islamabad for their safety. A survey conducted in this regard also confirmed when 53 percent of the respondents expressed their fear of being not expressing their views in public places such as mosque, market, Hujra and Jirga due to the overall insecurity in the region (FATA Research Centre, 2012).²⁵

It is not difficult to understand FATA in terms of war. When the civilians are bombed with impunity and drones are falling at their homes, there is rising hatred and intolerance of state policies. The state's war with militancy is hardly popular among the tribes who simply believe that government is sold out to America in exchange for dollars. There is need to understand the psychology of those who have lost their families, in areas where the code of revenge is a century-old tradition. When they see their children killed, they don't care whether it is a Pakistani or a foreigner killed in the suicide attacks, it is simply 'revenge' (Setha, 2011).²⁶

National Action Plan (NAP)- A comprehensive policy

The government efforts in demilitarization of the country in general, and FATA in particular, is seen after the Army Public School masacare by the Taliban in December 2014. The government started famous operation Zarb-e-Azab against the militants in the entire country in full swing. The most important 14 points National Action Plan (NAP) was chalked out to wipe out all kinds of militancy, extremism and terrorism from the country in a broader way. This NAP is not limited to the military use but also to all the aspect of militancy are incorporated in it. New efforts like establishment of Military Courts, establishment of NACTA, crack down against the facilitator and reforms in religious institutions are the important aspect of the National Action Plan. The government efforts through military operations and reforms in differents sectors in soceity have changed the situation and finally the terrorists were defeated with multi facted approaches at the same time. The other military operation (operation Rdul Fasaad) is also part of that strategy which is still continuing in different parts of the country.

Conclusion

The government efforts to normalize situation and establish peace in the tribal areas, in general, and in the entire country, in particular, focused on different measures in shape of military operations and peace agreements simultaneously. These military operations ended in some peace agreements with the militants who gave them more space and resources to expand their activities in the other parts of the country. After the agreements, short fall appeared in shape of more militant activities; the government started other military operations which resultant in more casualty and destructions for the tribal areas.

The government limitations in access to the remotest areas in the tribal areas was helped by the US drone policy of 'targeted killing' resulted in more alienations of the tribal people from the government. Sometimes these drone attacks compelled the militants to violate the peace agreement or made impossible for the people to support the government efforts in this regards. It all changed after the APS tragedy in 2014 when the government started not only military operations in the entire country but a comprehensive anti terrorism policies were chalked out. The most important military operations (operation Zarb-e-Azb and operation Raddul Fasad) were the final rounds against the militants because of these operations; the whole region was made cleared. The government efforts to clear the tribal areas from the militants in true spirit and from the rest of the country were seen in the recent government efforts at all level and still they are continue in right direction. It is more important that the NAP should implemented in true spirit in the entire country for long time and needs more efforts in deradicalization of the society through other means of action.

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