

Terrorism and Violence: A Note on the Targeted Killing in the Tribal Agency of Bajaur, Pakistan

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Abstract

Lately, the Taliban aimed to spread terror, insecurity and created space for extremism in the absence of the local leadership in the tribal belt of Pakistan. The existing/traditional leadership—*Khan* and *Malik* are not only considered the symbol of power, but they also maintain socio-political order in the tribal belt because they coordinate between government and the common people of the tribal society. The Taliban succeeded in minimizing the role of existing structure and created space for themselves in the absence of Khans and Maliks (traditional leaders of the tribal society). This paper critically investigates the phenomenon of targeted killings in Bajaur agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) during the War on Terror. It is concluded that the targeted killings of tribal chieftains have an impact on the social order of Bajaur agency. The research is based on interviews, un-published government document and a case study of the few tribal elders to understand the impact of tribal elders targeted killing on the existing social order in light of anthropological perspective.

Keywords: Terrorism, Target Killing, Maliks

Introduction

The tribal belt had remained a center of radicalism in the 18th century when the tribals showed stiff resistance to the British and provided basis for the radical movement of Syed Ahmad Shaheed. After the partition of colonial India the region has faced the same type of resistance movements. As a result of the soviet invasion, the militarization of the entire tribal belt started at large scale in 1980 by the US and Pakistan. However, the targeted killing in that period was not deployed as a war tactic due to cooperation between the Mujahidin and the sponsoring States for vested interests (Qadir, 2016). The Taliban claim the same legacy and manipulate tribesmen for their cause (Rana, Jihad aur Jihadi, 2003).

Since then the extremists and Jihadi groups (holy warriors) have been active in the tribal belt. The tribals have also supported the Pakistan government in Afghan War when the USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and the tribal belt was used as a training center for these Jihadi groups. There were 104 violent jihadi and 82 sectarian groups of varying strength operating in Pakistan before September 9, 2001 (Ali A. , 2016). All of these groups came into being in the 1980s and 1990s. In the FATA the number of militant groups grew fast as well as in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa where more than 50 local Taliban and a number of other violent religious groups came into being within just six years (Rana, 2009).

It was 2001 when the phenomenon of the targeted killing of the tribal elders and civilians started in general in Pakistan and particularly in the tribal belt of Pakistan bordered with Afghanistan. As a result of the US attack on Afghanistan the Taliban regime was toppled and the Taliban fighters infiltrated in the whole tribal agency and particularly in Bajaur (Ali A. , 2016). During 2006 to 2012, the intensity of the targeted killings remained high in Bajaur and claimed lives of the *Maliks* (tribal elders/tribal chieftains), journalists, leaders of the *Lashkars* (Anti-Taliban militias) and local politicians (Malik, 2013).

Prior to 1979 the power structure in the tribal belt was balanced as the two powerful political elements, tribes and government, co-existed peacefully. After the withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan and the emergence of the different Jihadists organizations, particularly, with entering of the Taliban fighters into the tribal areas the traditional power structure in the FATA was disturbed. To make the traditional power structure tilt in their favour, the heavily armed militants started targeted killing of tribal elders after spying or labeling on them pro-government charges (Leghari, 2008).

The phenomenon of targeted killings has different definitions depending upon how it is perceived and used in different circumstances. Targeted killing may refer to “[i]ntentional, premeditated and deliberate use of lethal force, by States or their agents acting under colour of law, or by an organized armed group in armed conflict, against a specific individual who is not in the physical custody of the perpetrator” (Mcneal, 2014). Targeted killing is one of the techniques or tools of terror. In Pakistan targeted killing is an offshoot of terrorism, which is a broad phenomenon. The motives behind the targeted killing is not just to kill a single person, like he or she may be a political leader, a security officer, a tribal elder/chieftain, a journalist, but with such act, the militants want to convey a harsh message to the entire community, association or tribe. And mostly this message is to weaken, terrorize and keep a certain family, community, association and tribe under a constant hype (Riaz, 2016).

In Bajaur agency militants were targeting tribal elders to spread terror among the people and to weaken the administrative system as tribal elders were functioning as a bridge between the political/government administration and the tribal people. The killings of influential and powerful tribal elders created horror in the tribal people who started feeling of insecurity. The militants worked with clear objectives to control civilians, spread terror and shatter the tribal administrative system where the tribal elders help the Political Agent (agency administrator) in maintaining law and

order situation. As the thinking, goals and modus operandi of the targeted killings changed in Bajaur agency, Dr. Khadim Hussain interprets this situation as the tribal elders in Bajaur were targeted with clear intentions to fulfill particular political, cultural and social objectives. The targeted killing in Bajaur was used as a planned manner of violence; the tribal chieftains were targeted who were proving hurdles to the desired objectives of the militants (Hussain, 2016).

Escalation of Targeted Killings in Bajaur Agency

Targeted killing is not a new phenomenon. Like other agencies of Pakistan it has an old history in Bajaur agency. The tool of targeted killing has been in use in both tribal belt and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for over decades.

Militancy and invention of modern technology has however recently transformed the traditional phenomenon of targeted killing into a more sophisticated and scientific form. Targeted killing existed in tribal belt and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa before 9/11 terrorists attacks on the US twin towers, but during that time, the very factors, forms and manifestations of target killing were different. Even, at that time, this word of “targeted killing” was not very commonly used. During that era, personal enmity was the primary reason behind majority of killings, sometimes; the wealthy party was using the *Hujrati Qatil* (hired-killer or assassin) (Riaz, 2016).

According to Khan, an official in FATA Secretariat, around 1,035 tribal elders fell prey to targeted killing since 2006 to 2012 in the FATA. Hundreds more of these tribal elders sustained serious or minor injuries during targeted killing and likewise hundreds were forced to flee their homes and shift to safer places. In seven agencies of the FATA--Khyber, Bajaur, Momand, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan--the total number of tribal elders is about 4,2647, among them some have got special perks and privileges from agency administrator i.e. called as political agent (Khan, 2016).

In return these tribal elders assist the political agent in maintaining law and order situation in their respective agency. If any of the tribal elder is found non-cooperative or if he violates the government directives then his perks and privileges are curtailed (Khan, 2016). These tribal elders play key role in the administrative affairs, they are considered as parts of the government machinery in the tribal belt. If from government the tribal elders were receiving benefits, receiving a bullet from the militants by these tribal elders was imminent and obvious.

When US toppled Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001 and militants made their ways to Pakistan's tribal areas, tribal elders became their first target to

cripple the government machinery. While forming the Anti-Taliban militias in 2008, tribal elders materialized the apparent fear of the Taliban that in the event of conflict between militants and the Pakistani government, tribal elders could form anti-Taliban *Lashkars* (private army) and turn the local population against militants (Khan M. A., 2015). The tribal chieftains under threat, preferred to form *Lashkars* (militia) against the militants, as they were reluctant to accept the protection of the state, as this would have been contrary to their Pakhtun and tribal gallantry values and honour (Malik, 2013).

According to FATA Secretariat Peshawar, total 255 tribal chieftains have been killed in Bajaur from 2006 to 2012, i.e. the highest figure of killing Maliks or tribal elders as compared to other agencies of the FATA. Malik Shah Jehan was the first who was targeted in Bajaur and then the list of killing tribal elders extended to 255. All names could not be accommodated here, however, see appendix for a brief list of few key and influential tribal elders fell prey to targeted killing in Bajaur (Khan, 2016).

Mainly the un-conventional form of the targeted killing was used in Bajaur agency. The intelligence agencies, mafia, gangsters and militants were involved in targeting the tribal elders in Bajaur. In un-conventional targeted killing, the intelligence agencies hire assassins, killers or companies like the US did it in Iraq through Black Water (Nazir, 2016). Contrary to the un-conventional targeted killing, the conventional targeted killing is the one that is conducted or sponsored by the state. The killing of a militants commander Nek Muhammad Wazir in a US drone strike in South Waziristan on June 18, 2004 and even the killing of Osama Bin Laden in US Navy seal operation on May 2, 2011 are included in conventional target killing, though both the operations were carried out by United States, but as they are State sponsored killing, thus they are included in conventional target killing. As both these killings were pre-planned, particularly, the killing of Nek Muhammad, who was obviously indicated by Pakistani government, is example of conventional target killing (Nazir, 2016).

Tribal Elders (Maliks) killed in Bajaur

For in-depth investigation and clarity of the topic, few cases/examples of tribal elders who fell prey to targeted killing are mentioned here. Following list received from the political administration of Bajaur agency gives details of the different tribal elders targeted in Bajaur.

Name Of Tribal Elder	Tehsil	Month	Date	Year
Malik Shah Jehan	Mamound	July	7	2007
Maulana Gul Sher	Mamound	June		2008

HajiRahmatullah	Mamound	December	7	2009
Malik Khan Wali	Mamound	December	7	2009
Malik Abdul Wadood	Mamound	December	7	2009
Mailk Abdul Ahad	Mamound	December	7	2009
MalikFaqir	Mamound	November	20	2008
MalikRahmatullah	Mamound	November	21	2008
Malik Abdul Majeed	Mamound	October	3	2009
MalikToorMulla	NawagiCharmang	August	23	2009
MalikGul Mohammad	Mamound	December	26	2009
MalikSherZaman	Mamound	December		2009
MalikGul Khan	NawagiCharmang	August		2009
MalikSardar Khan	Mamound	June		2008
MalikZakirullah	Slarzi	January	3	2009
MalikMohibullah	Slarzi	January	3	2009
MalikMamoor Khan	Khar	January	26	2008
MalikMursalin	Nawagi	January		2008
MalikAmeer Khan	Khar	August	3	2009
MalikStana Khan	Mamound	January		2009
MalikWalit Khan	Khar	June	3	2010
Malik Ismail Khan	Khar	September	17	2010
MalikNawabZada	Khar	September	17	2010
Malik Abdul Qayum	Khar	January	17	2010
Malik Shah Farooq	Mamound	October	25	2010
MalikJehangir Khan	Khar	January	1	2009
MalikBanars Khan	Slarzi	January	27	2010
MalikSherZaman	Mamound	November	15	2009
Malik Shah Poor Khan	Mamound	November	27	2009
MalikJandool Khan	Mamound	October	22	2009
MalikMuhamad Islam Armani	Nawagi	April	12	2009
MalikMunir Khan	Mamound	April	11	2009
NawabZadaShamsulWahab Khan	Khar	August	16	2007
MalikAlif Khan	Nawagi	September		2007
MalikHussain Khan	Khar	July		2007
Malik Mohammad Ayaz	Nazakai, Slarzi	June	2	2007

On the top of the list is Malik Shah Jehan who was one of the renowned tribal elders of Mamond Tehsil of Bajaur agency. According to Sultan Zeb, his father Malik Shah Jehan was shot dead by unknown gunmen on July 7, 2007. Being a pro-government tribal elder, Malik Shah Jehan belonged to Tarkani tribe. Sultan Zeb is the only son of Malik Shah Jehan, while Jehan left five daughters when he was targeted in 2007. According to Sultan Zeb his father Malik Shah Jehan was around 70 when he was killed.

The killing of the undaunted Malik Shah left deep marks on the social, cultural and political arena of Bajaur. Being a pro-government tribal chieftain, Malik Shah Jehan worked as a bridge in between the government and the tribals. He always played pivotal role in resolving land and other disputes in Bajaur. With killing of Malik Shah Jehan, a wave of horror spread in Bajaur, the tribesmen felt themselves insecure. Malik Shah Jehan was killed near colony of Khar, and Sultan Zeb was informed about the incident by hospital staff. Zeb doesn't know who were behind the killing of his father, but movements like Tahrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat Mohammadi and the Taliban were active at that time.

The killing of Malik Shah Jehan not only left his family but the entire Tarkani tribe orphan. Sultan Zeb recalls, "My father was an experienced head of our family, after his death, my family was affected socially, psychologically and financially." Not only our family, the entire tribe was affected, the people still remember him when they face some problem. Zeb says, "Though peace is restored to Bajaur but the fear still persists and the tribesmen are still guarding the area and the armed tribesmen have their turn to watch and safeguard roads and homes in the area(Zeb, 2016)."

Another influential malik to be killed was Malik Mohammad Ayaz. He was killed in a bomb blast in Salarzai Tehsil of Bajaur agency on June 2, 2007. He left five sons and three daughters and two wives behind. Presently, his one wife is alive. Belonging to a tribe of Tarkani, Malik Mohammad Ayaz was also pro-government tribal elder. Nasar, one of the five sons of Malik Mohammad Ayaz, told according to national identity card (NIC) his father (Malik Mohammad Ayaz) year of birth was 1935.

According to National Identity Card (NIC) the age of Malik Ayaz was 65; however, his original age was 78. Malik Ayaz along with his son was killed in a blast in a bazaar, after he was returning while burning some houses of the locals, as agency surgeon doctor was killed in the area. Though Malik Ayaz had received no threats, but he was quite aware of the grave situation in the agency, therefore, minutes before his death, he told the youngsters who were traveling with him in a pickup, "I have spent much part of my life, but I have deep concern for you as you are still young", Nasar recalled. Malik Ayaz had resolved some severe local issues

through Jirgas, and there are several examples that due to his efforts the enmity was changed into friendly relations. During his life, the militants could hardly dare to carry out their activities, and the locals remember him as a gentle, shrewd and judicious elder (Nasar, 2016).

Another influential malik was Wahab Kahn. Ahmad Ali is the eldest son of NawabZadaShamsulWahab Khan. According to National Identity Card (NIC) Wahab Khan was born in 1951. Belonging to Tarkani tribe of Khar Tehsil, Wahab Khan was killed in a blast on August 16, 2007. He left three sons and two daughters behind. He said his father's vehicle was targeted in a blast in Shawa graveyard (Shawa is Pashto name of a Willow tree), the graveyard has now named as ShuhadaChowk (Martyr Square). He said his father was receiving threats and once a bomb was also planted near his house. The killing of Wahab Khan's left worst marks on the entire family. Being an elder son of Wahab Khan, Ali said, "This incident affected me and my family economically, psychologically and socially. My study was also affected." The locals faced many problems after the killing of WahabKhan(Ali A. , 2016).

The very existence of these tribal elders was a great challenge to the narrative and goal of militants. Through targeting tribal chieftains, to a great extent militants succeeded in spreading fear in the tribal society and fracturing the bond between the tribals and the political administration. Due to militancy the entire Pakhtun codes were changed as Jirgas, funerals, mosques and tribal elders traveling along with women and children were attacked. In the first ever attack on a Jirga, a traditional council, occurred in Bajaur when about 200 men from SalarzaiKhar were chalking out plan to oust militants from their area. A bomber walked up to the Jirga and detonated explosives strapped to his body(Dawn, 2008).

In the last decade such attacks got firmed roots in the tribal culture that were earlier considered as acts of cowardice and contrary to tribal norms. These staunch and deep-seated Pakhtun norms and values were barely violated during the last decade in Bajaur(Yusuf, 2016).

Political Implications

It was overthrowing the Taliban reign following the US assault on Afghanistan that some tribesmen also began to organize themselves with a Taliban-style Islamic ideology. They came forth to pursue agenda identical to that of the Afghan Taliban leading to the killing of hundreds tribal elders to establish them as an alternative force in the region(Khan H. , 2012).

Like other agencies, in Bajaur too the Taliban succeeded to widen the gap between the tribesmen and the political administration. Some tribesmen oppressed

by the tribal system where influential tribal elders/maliks had a key role started perceiving Taliban as their survivors. The Taliban started targeting the pro-government tribal elders who helped the political administration in maintaining law and order situation in return of *Longi* (turban) allowance. The Taliban broadly used three-point strategy to create the vacuum for themselves in Bajaur agency.

- 1) Firstly, the Taliban took steps against the criminals to win sympathies and support of the tribesmen.
- 2) They started targeting the influential tribal elders who challenged their authority.
- 3) They set-up their own shura (council), courts or dispute resolution mechanism and thus mitigated the role of tribal elders and Jirga(Rana, 2009).

The Taliban not only started targeting tribal elders but also set-up court in Bajaur to minimize the influence of tribal elders. One Taliban court had registered 1,400 cases until August 2008 and decided 1,000 out of them(Yusaf Ali. and Javed Afridi, 2008).

This posed a direct challenge to the writ of the government. According to a research conducted by BBC Urdu Service and published in April 2009, the civilian government no longer exercised authority over 24 percent areas of the FATA(BBC, 2009).

These tribal elders worked as a bridge between the tribesmen and the agency administration. A 'political agent' (civil servant) administers an agency of FATA, and is answerable to the governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Taliban made this administrative system ineffective and fragile by killing hundreds of the tribal chieftains and continuously threatening the agency administrators. The government failed to comply with the people demands of protecting their lives and properties. Meanwhile, several criminal gangs also surfaced and indulged in crimes like theft, looting, robbing, plundering, kidnapping and killing of innocent people. The Taliban succeeded in curtailing the inherited government-to-people relationship by targeting the influential tribal elders(Khan Z. A., 2012).

Power Vacuum

After crossing over to the FATA, the Taliban wanted to create a space in order to establish their writ, i.e. commonly known as militants challenged the government writ and wanted to set up a parallel system in the tribal belt, thus they first started to produce a vacuum that could later be filled by them. For creating this vacuum and breaking the bond of government functionaries and tribal elders, militants started targeted killing of the most influential tribal elders in FATA(Riaz, 2016).

Security and political analyst Dr. Khadim Hussain also having the same view, the militants wanted to create a particular kind of vacuum, social, cultural and political so that it is filled with their own discourse, the victims were the people who used to challenge the discourse of militants' organization, as their challenge used to be effective and were blocking the ways of militants' objectives, thus they were targeted. The non-state actors/militants targeted the tribal elders to create mainly three-types of vacuum in Bajaur

- 1) To shift the decision making-power corridor from the tribal elders to the Taliban shura (council).
- 2) The tribal elders are being considered as a source of wisdom and they have full grasp of the tribal cultural traits and social institutions like Jirga and Pakhtunwali. They are considered as source of indigenous knowledge and take indigenous-knowledge-based decisions drawing guidance of the tribal principles, customs, traditions and institutions. The non-state actors targeted them to create vacuum for their new radicalized thought drawing guidance of the hardcore Jihadist ideas.
- 3) The non-state actors targeted the tribal elders as they wanted to create the vacuum to be filled with their new theocratic discourse.

Dr. Khadim Hussain reveals that the militants also targeted spies or those people who were taking interest in gathering information about militants' activities, perhaps they were not spies, but their interest of gathering information made their status dubious and were targeted by the militants in the name of spies in Bajaur agency.

The militants groups also targeted the religious scholars who were not following religious sects of the militants' outfits or were challenging their discourse of Jihad. Political activists and state officials were also targeted in both the FATA and KP for certain objectives. The defunct Tehrik-i-Taliban has claimed majority of incidents of the targeted killing (Hussain, 2016).

Targeted killing is very common in those societies that are called un-organized society, a term used in sociology for those societies where law enforcement agencies are weak to establish writ of the government. Unfortunately, this sociological definition can also be applied on Pakistan society where law enforcement agencies are weak to implement rule of law and have weak control. In Pakistan there is also sectarian conflict that is a big cause of target killing in some of the tribal areas and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Basharat, 2016).

Pakistani society is a lawless society, poverty, weakness of law enforcing institutions, unawareness and low literacy rate provide chances to the foreigners and a few-handpicked people to play with the peace and tranquility of the society. Dr. Basharat Hussain reveals, "We are living in a state of constant denial, instead

of resolving, we are denying the pressing issues, thus our problems are multiplying and getting complex day by day.” The main sociological impact of target killings, particularly those ignited by sectarian conflict has created trust deficit (Basharat, 2016).

Conclusion

The phenomenon of the targeted killing continues in Bajaur agency and the militants are succeeding in weakening the bridge, coordination and communication system between local elders and political administration. With militants targeting the highly influential tribal elders who were supposed to help the political administration in protecting the local tribesmen, the feelings of insecurity have increased among the local tribesmen in Bajaur.

With the targeted killings going on for over a decade now, the political administration has also weakened. The primary reason is that powerful tribal chieftains fear to extend their support to the political administration. In the past the political agent often relied on tribal chieftains for maintaining law and order situation. Tribal elders often supported the political administration for getting certain perks and privileges usually called as *Longi* (allowance from Rs. 200 to Rs. 6000). But tribal elders now fear as militants target them for their loyalties or support to the political administration. Thus due to targeted killings of the tribal chieftains the close liaison between the political administration and the tribal chieftains is badly affected.

The militants targeted those tribal elders who supported the government forces against the Taliban and this process still goes on. Beside other pro-government tribal chieftains, leaders of the *Lashkar* (Anti-Taliban militias) also remained one of the prime targets of the militants. As this conflict between the militants and the elders of the Anti-Taliban militias has now almost been transformed into a personal feud between these two rival groups, this points to the possibility that there is no end to the targeted killings in Bajaur agency in near future.

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