

Implications of the War On Terror for Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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The US-led War on Terror in Afghanistan conducted for the aim of eliminating Al-Qaeda and Osama-bin-Laden has brought about enormous economic, social and political changes in the region. Pakistan's role as a front-line state in the War on Terror has had profound implications for its domestic politics and foreign policy. Pakistan not only took a U-turn on its Afghanistan policy, but also had to crack down on internal extremism and terrorism. Several military operations were carried out against the so-called terrorist factions in tribal areas and some other parts of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), renamed as Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KPK) under the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of 1973 of Pakistan. With a majority Pashtun population, KPK has been a target of the War on Terror due to its social structure, cultural restraints and the religion of its inhabitants on the boundary with Afghanistan. The socio-cultural similarities and geographical proximity with Afghanistan have made it a sanctuary for Al-Qaeda members. The War on Terror in KPK has had negative political, economic and social repercussions for the region and thus has created hatred among the Pashtuns. This paper is an attempt to analyze the factors which made the Pashtuns of this area prone to militancy. It will analyze the political, economic and social implications of the War on Terror for KPK in general and its Pashtun population in particular.

I. Background

The US-led *Operation Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan and the consequent defeat of the Taliban regime resulted in massive infiltration of al-Qaeda from Afghanistan into neighbouring countries. Iran has always condemned the Taliban for their anti-Shia activities in Afghanistan. In these circumstances, al-Qaeda members and the Taliban had no other option except to take refuge in the border lands of Pakistan. Pakistan shares a 1500miles long border with Afghanistan and some 300 passes link Afghanistan with KPK

and Baluchistan (Hilali, 2005, p.246).

KPK spans an area of 74,521 sq km (28,773 sq miles) and has a population of 14 million (1998 estimate) in which about 73 percent speak Pashto. In the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the number of Pashtu speakers is 99 percent (Government of Pakistan, 2009, p. 332). On the western side KPK is populated by the traditional orthodox Pashtuns of the Tribal Areas who strictly adhere to their customs and traditions. Their social structure and culture are regulated by *Pashtunwali* (The Pashtun way), a common code of conduct: moral and legal. The key principles of this code are honour, courage, hospitality, asylum and inheritance of power by the heirs. Hospitality and providing refuge and asylum are closely related to the tenets of honour. The Pashtuns across the border share this code and also strictly adhere to the norms of *Pashtunwali*. A similar code of conduct, shared history and culture, and the long border between Afghanistan and KPK with freedom of cross-border movement, bring the regions close to one other. Moreover, the economy of the tribal areas is separate from the national economy and 'money for services' is common practice in these areas, including smuggling and providing refuge to criminals and terrorists (Ahmad, 2008). The socio-cultural and ethnic affinity and economic conditions of the Pashtun areas along the border with Afghanistan were not only exploited by the Taliban and Al Qaeda for getting roots in these areas, but also by the Pakistani state in creating *Jihadi* groups and the Taliban to further their interests in the region.

Pakistan's political, economic and social instability was of deep concern for US policy makers after 9/11, because Pakistan was considered a sanctuary for the terrorists ousted from Afghanistan due to its volatile nature (Burki, 2002). Another point of concern for the US were the Pashtun inhabited areas of Pakistan, especially Peshawar, Quetta and the Tribal Areas which showed solidarity with anti-US forces by providing a safe-haven to Islamic militants and al-Qaeda members (Kronstadt, 2007). Consequently, Pakistan had to take serious measures including direct military intervention against militants in different parts of KPK, resulting in chaotic disturbances of the political, economic and social life of KPK.

This paper provides a critical analysis of the events since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to determine the factors leading to the rise of militancy in Pashtun dominated areas of KPK. It will analyze how ethnicity was used by Pakistan in the creation of *Jihadi* groups from the Soviet-Afghan war up until 9/11. It will also analyze the shift in Pakistan's policy towards the Taliban.

II. The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Rise of Pashtun Militancy

In December 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to support the pro-communist regime and advance Soviet interests in the region. Within two weeks of the invasion the

Afghans were armed for resistance against the Soviet forces (Kuperman, 1999). Sensing that its own security was at stake, Pakistan joined the US-led proxy war with the Afghan Mujahideen. The ISI and CIA analyzed the inclination of Pashtuns towards each other across the border. Their assessment concluded that the Pashtuns would be more resilient to the Soviets and that they were willing to fight a “holy war” against the Red Army alongside their fellow Pashtuns in Afghanistan (Ziring, 2005, p.187). Several Madrassas and Mujahideen training camps were established in KPK, Baluchistan and Punjab, and heavy funds and ammunitions were brought into Pakistan for the Mujahideen.

The Pashtuns are more inclined to the Deobandi school of thought, so to get the support of the majority of Pashtuns, most of the Madrassas established during the Soviet-Afghan war followed Deobandi’s teachings. According to Hilali (2005, pp.121-122), from 1982-88, the number of Mujahideen trained in Pakistan by the ISI and CIA was more than 1.6 million. The number of Mujahideen training camps settled in Pakistan was 92, including 40 in KPK. During this period, about \$3.5 billion in aid and 65,000 tons of weapons were provided for the Afghan resistance against the Soviets. Pashtuns formed the majority of the Mujahideen and Islamic guerrilla groups like the *Ittihad-i-Islami* (Islamic Union) led by Abd al-Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf (Bernet Rubin, 1995, pp. 223-224). During the war with the Soviets and the subsequent civil war, approximately 2.5 million Afghans took refuge in Pakistan, of whom 80% were Pashtuns (Hussain, 2005, p. 118). By March 2005, a total of 3,049,268 Afghans were reported to be in Pakistan; 62 percent of them in KPK (UNHCR, 2005).

After the escalation of the Soviet invasion force, a civil war broke out among the southern Pashtun warlords, which further jeopardized the social and political set up and the law and order situation in Afghanistan. Taliban, a Pashtun majority religious movement, emerged in Afghanistan and then in the religious Madaris in Pakistan to ensure the security of Afghanistan and end the civil war (Rubin, 2002). The Taliban were able to capture Kabul on 27 September 1996. Pakistan was supportive of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan with the intention to transform it into its client state for achieving its geostrategic and economic objectives (Hussain, 2005, p.201). In the Afghan conflict the Taliban were considered the most reliable pro-Pakistan elements. Pakistan performed the role of staffing and equipping the Taliban, and by the end of December 1994 more than 12,000 recruits had joined in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2000, p. 29). The Taliban received heavy assistance from Pakistan in terms of arms, men and ammunition. Thousands of recruits from the religious madrassas and training camps joined the Taliban by late 1997 (Hussain, 2005, p. 204).

The inter-linkage of the Taliban and the Pakistani establishment continued until 9/11 and afterwards. However, the Taliban’s refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden and his followers to the US jeopardized their legitimacy. The Taliban considered the request against their tradition of asylum. Mullah Umar and other leaders of the Taliban

government repeatedly pleaded for proof to be given of al-Qaeda's involvement in the incident and for the trial to be held in Afghanistan according to their own law. Mullah Abdus Salam Zaeef commented that it was an issue of faith not to hand over Osama bin Laden (Dawn, 2001). Some analysts are more materialist in their analysis of the Taliban's behaviour. According to Michael Rubin (2002, p.10), the Taliban's support for Bin Laden and his friends was material in nature and not based on their tradition of asylum. The Pashtuns along the border with Afghanistan enjoyed freedom of interaction with their fellow Pashtuns across the border not only during the Soviet-Afghan war but also during the Taliban regime and even after the US attack against the Taliban. Meanwhile, the Arab, Tajik, Chechen and Afghan infiltration into the tribal areas of Pakistan continued mainly into FATA (Rashid, 2002). Talibanization of this region began in 2004 and spread to Mohmand, Bajaur, Orakzai, Kurram agencies and enjoyed support even from the settled areas of Bannu, Tank, Kohat, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Swat and Buner (Fair, 2009).

III. Operations in KPK

After 9/11 Pakistan had no option but to change its policies towards Taliban in Afghanistan and their tribal areas. Pakistan's anti-terror campaign started with the military operation against the turbulent tribes in Waziristan, in search of the foreign militants who had fled from Afghanistan and had been provided sanctuary as guests. The Pakistani Army infiltrated South Waziristan in 2002 and fought the Waziris led by Nek Muhammad. After signing the *Shakai* peace deal with the *Waziris*, the army entered the Mehsud area in 2004 which also resulted in a peace agreement with Baitullah Mehsud. A similar deal was signed with the Taliban led by Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan. By September 2005 more than 80,000 troops were involved in the anti-terror campaign in FATA and they had captured about 700 Al Qaeda suspects. During the operations, 270 Pakistani troops were killed and 600 were wounded (*USA Today*, 2005). Another operation was carried out against the *Mehsuds* tribe in 2007, which culminated in a peace deal when 250 soldiers were taken hostage by the *Mehsuds* at *Khaisura* (Raja, 2009). In June 2008 military operations were launched at Khyber Agency and then at Bajaur Agency in July 2008.

Soon after the Waziristan campaign, the Pakistani army also engaged in an operation against the *Lal Masjid* (Red Mosque) and *Jamia Hafsa* administration in Islamabad for their anti-state activities and the organization of anti-American and pro-Taliban demonstrations. The operation resulted in the death of Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi, the leader of the movement, and several other Madrassa students and teachers along with security officials. According to the Inspector General of Police (IGP), in the *Lal Masjid* operation, 102 people were killed (including 91 civilians and 11 soldiers) and

248 injured (including 204 civilians) (Iqbal, 2007). Soon after the operation against *Lal Masjid* and *Jamia Hafsa*, a serious law and order problem arose in KPK. The *Lal Masjid* operation added fuel to the anti-government sentiment among the Pashtun population in KPK. Students of various Madrassas in KPK retaliated against the *Lal Masjid* operation and stormed the offices of the political agents of Khyber and Mohmand agencies as well as military convoys.

With foreign support Baitullah's *Tehrik-e-Taliban* Pakistan (TTP) spread to the whole of FATA and Swat and also to some settled parts of KPK and South Punjab (BBC News, 2009). *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi* (TNSM) was active in Swat under the leadership of Fazlullah. Initially TNSM was supported by the public and was perceived to be the torch bearer of Islam. They were funded by religious minded people on the ground and were able to impose *Shariah law* in Swat. However, after gaining power the TNSM turned to brutal actions against the public and government officials (Siddiqi, 2007). The military operation, *Rah-e-Haq*, was carried out in the Swat valley on the request of the provincial government and lasted for about three months, ending in the death of about 36 security personals, 9 civilians and 615 activists (*The News*, 2008).

In February 2009 the government of KPK signed an agreement with the Taliban of Swat introducing *Nizam-e-Adl*, but the Taliban refusal to de-weaponize, in addition to their occupation of Buner and Lower Dir, made the government reassess its policy towards Fazlullah. Consequently, operation *Rah-e-Rast* was launched in Swat on 28th April 2009. The linkage of militants with foreign powers and their acts of terror against the innocent people created mass resentment and even the Islamic political parties stood behind the army in their operations against the militants (Raja, n.d).

IV. Implications

The disturbance in Pakistan's tribal region has ramifications for the country's domestic security and for the interests of the US, China and Iran. According to Subash Kapila (2006), "Pakistan's Western Frontiers inter-sect the strategic interests of the United States, China and Iran and even India. Hence the explosiveness of these frontiers does not remain a solely Pakistani domestic concern but also has serious external implications for these states." The operation in FATA and Swat and the security of the western borders has over-stretched the Pakistani Army and has resulted in chaotic disturbances in KPK. The operation in tribal areas has undermined the foundations of the social, political and economic structure of KPK; the Pashtun areas in particular.

The US-led War on Terror in Afghanistan and in KPK by the Pakistani Army gave rise to popular resentment and hatred in KPK and especially among the Pashtun population against the army and the Musharraf regime. According to a survey conducted

by the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS), about 18% of Pakistani Madrassas have affiliations with *Jihadi* and sectarian groups; 78% students of these madrassas are against Pakistan's role in the War on Terror and 81% are against military operations in tribal areas; and 20% of the students consider the current insurgency a direct reaction to Pakistan's role in the War on Terror (Rana, 2009). The anti-terror operations in KPK are being viewed as attempted genocide against the Pashtuns of tribal areas and as a threat to their ethnic and Islamic identity. Moreover, the intervention of the army into tribal areas is perceived by tribal leaders as a threat to their authority and tribal values (Mazari, 2004). These factors have resulted in the local Taliban gaining strength. The rise of Molvi Fazlullah in Swat is one example. They consider it a war against Islam and against the Pashtuns. The Taliban government led by Mullah Umar and his associates were Pashtuns educated in Islamic madrassas in Pakistan. As such their government was viewed by the Pashtuns as the only hope of an Islamic caliphate; and thus, the attack against them was bitterly criticized by the masses in KPK. The resulting disturbances in the country have had a devastating impact on the economy and society due to decreased foreign investment, depressed trade, and ongoing fear and uncertainty in the country (Mahmood, 2002).

The efforts of the Pakistani government to eradicate militancy at home have had profound effects on the rising insurgencies in the country. According to a report by South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), in the period 2003-2010 Pakistan faced serious fatalities due to terrorist violence. The total fatalities include 3,087 civilian and 10,887 terrorist casualties (SATP Report, 2010). Pakistan's army has endured 8,775 casualties, including 2,273 killed and 6,512 injured (US CENTCOM, n.d.). This has led to a serious law and order problem and the government's failure to stop suicide bombing and terrorist insurgencies in even settled areas has put the legitimacy of the state at stake. The public questions the military operations and people are in a state of confusion.

The US-led War on Terror and the Musharraf policies towards KPK – especially towards tribal areas – had even worse implications for the provincial government of *Mutahiddah Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA). MMA was formed in January 2002 in opposition to the US war against Afghanistan and the consequent US-Pakistan partnership by the six major parties from the Pak-Afghan Defense Council, consisting of as many as 26 religious parties and smaller groups. The objective was to contest the October 2002 general elections from a common platform (ICG, Asia Report, 2003).

In its manifesto the MMA proclaimed the ambition to get rid of the influence of external powers in foreign policy decision making and to exert moral, political and diplomatic support to the people of Palestine, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Chechnya (Khan, 2002). It focused its entire election campaign on injustices against the Muslim *Ummah*, the US War on Terror and Musharraf's constitutional, political and secular policies. In the elections of 2002 the MMA made a breakthrough in KPK and Baluchistan

and emerged as the third largest party in the National Assembly by securing 53 general seats including 8 from FATA, 14 reserved seats for women and 10 minority seats, winning 82 percent of its National Assembly seats in these two provinces. At a provincial level the MMA got 48 out of 99 general seats in KPK and 15 out of 51 in Baluchistan. It formed an independent government in KPK and entered into a coalition with the Pakistan Muslim League in Baluchistan (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2002).

Various factors underlie the surprise success of the MMA in the elections of 2002. It could be explained by the unity of the MMA, the active involvement of local authorities in helping the election of pro-military political parties, the wide ranging mobilization of Madrassa students in the favor of the MMA, and the anti-Musharraf and anti-US sentiment formed during the War on Terror (Misra, 2002; Mutahir, 2002). The MMA presented their victory as a defeat to the forces representing secularism and American interests in the country (Naqvi, 2002).

During the War on Terror the MMA repeatedly denounced the US-Pakistan alliance in the ongoing operations in Afghanistan and the tribal areas. The MMA's leaders remarked in a joint statement that:

[Our] rulers are taking steps contrary to national security to please the USA and India. Pakistan faced unbearable losses for supporting the American war on terrorism and President Musharraf is responsible for it... Madaris are being raided on the dictation of the US government and the government is arresting and torturing religious scholars and students to appease the West. (Anti-Madaris Drive Aim at Appeasing the West: MMA).

However, the success of the MMA ended with the 2008 election, in which, contrary to the results of 2002, MMA only secured 6 seats in National Assembly, 2 in provincial assembly Punjab, 10 in Baluchistan and 14 in KPK (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2008). The MMA's failure can be attributed to their inability to live up to their promises and to meet the expectations of the voters given the centralized power structure in Pakistan. The MMA leadership still demands the abrogation of Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) and the restoration of negotiation by the *Jirga* (ul Haq, 2008). The failure of the MMA highlights the people's aspiration for political change which can protect their rights and provide security.

The economic situation in KPK is shaky; it requires prompt and active policy formulation and implementation. Moreover, the infrastructure of these areas is also damaged due to continuous bombing and militancy, and thus everyday life has become miserable. Local business suffered, especially in Mingora and some settled areas of Swat and Dir. Tourism plummeted due to the serious law and order problems. Some developmental projects under the Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZ) could not

be initiated due to security issues. Moreover, the Gomal Zam Dam, the Kurram Tangi Dam and Munda Dam faced similar problems.

The terrorist and counter-terrorist actions in the tribal areas have badly hampered the educational system of this area, which is already facing high illiteracy rates. According to governmental statistics the literacy rate in FATA is 17% (Government of Pakistan, 2009). The minimal educational infrastructure existing in these areas has been damaged by the militants. In Swat about 188 girls' and 97 boys' schools have been destroyed by the militants and persistent uncertainty stops students from attending educational institutions (Shah, 2008). Womens' education is in an especially terrible state, because girls are not allowed to attend schools and colleges by the militants. Not only in tribal areas, but also in settled areas, anonymous letters sent from militants are received by girls' colleges emphasizing proper *pardah*, veil, and threatening dire consequences otherwise.

Following the operations against the militants, a large number of people fled from their homes and took refuge in the Districts of Mardan, Swabi, Nowshera, Tank and Dera Ismail Khan. The National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) has registered approximately 1.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), of which 96% are registered in KPK (UNOCHA Report, 2009). By the end of 2009, the total number of IDPs from the South Waziristan area was about 428,000. The return of IDPs to their homes is another issue; fear of militants and poor economic conditions make IDPs reluctant to return. By September 2009 1.6 million had returned to their homes and about 1.1 million remained displaced (IDMC, 2010). The large influx of IDPs into the settled areas has put enormous pressure on the available resources in these areas. Under these conditions, the government faces serious economic challenges.

However, despite Pakistan's efforts in the War on Terror, Pakistan has received no recognition from her neighbours, especially India and Afghanistan. Pakistan has been continuously blamed by Afghan officials for cross-border infiltrations (Jafee, 2006). Musharraf's pledge to eradicate extremism came under close scrutiny after a Taliban attack on US troops near the Pakistani border (USA Today, 2005).

V. Conclusion

KPK and especially its Pashtun population in the tribal areas along the Durand Line has been a victim of the War on Terror. The tribal areas are viewed as a sanctuary for Taliban militants due to their closed society and strict adherence to cultural values and the tradition of hospitality. In the past, these socio-cultural affiliations were exploited by Pakistan for the creation of Jihadi elements in the tribal areas. As such, it is now the target of both large scale terrorist and anti-terrorist activities. The operations in tribal areas have undermined the very foundation of the social, political and economic structure of KPK

and the tribal areas in general. Moreover, anti-terror operations in KPK are being viewed as attempted genocide against the Pashtuns of the tribal areas and as a threat to their ethnic and Islamic identity. These factors have resulted in increased militancy and a local Taliban uprising in the region. Moreover, it has had severe implications for the democratic coalition government of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Awami National Party (ANP) in KPK. No military campaign can be successful without the support of the masses. In such situations, it is important for the government to switch to other policy options alongside the use of force. The government has launched several mega projects in the affected areas to win the hearts and minds of the people, including the 'Quick Impact Project' in Swat and also compensation packages for the affected people. Similarly, in tribal areas Rs.500 million has been allocated for development projects. However, these projects have failed to win the support of the people due to a lack of public participation. Such attempts are viewed by the tribal men as interference into their affairs and an attempt to modernize their society against their aspirations (Marwat, 2007).

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