

THE RISE AND FALL OF INSURGENCY IN NORTH WEST PAKISTAN

Introduction:

Nothing stands still, everything is in constant flux and without an iota of doubt one can not step into the same river twice.¹ This paper explores the phenomenon of insurgency in Pakistan in historical and comparative perspective. The critical appraisal of recent events in the region particularly on both sides of the Durand Line will help in understanding the nature, manifestations and implications of this imbroglio. Since Saur Revolution in Afghanistan in 1978 some important developments took place in this area of Asia for instance the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Afghans resistance to that invasion, disunion of the Soviet Union, war against terrorism, drug trafficking and political instability. It will be worthwhile to see the impact of these developments on the state and society of Pakistan with focus on militancy, insurgency, extremism, destabilization and terrorism. What kind of push and pull galvanized external and internal threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan. It is an attempt to analyze the causes and remedies of the problem Pakistan is facing in this point in time.

Setting the scene:

From the very beginning till the USSR invasion of Afghanistan Pakistan was a moderate and pluralistic society. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan culminated in turning it into the last battlefield of the Cold War. The two superpowers i.e. USSR and USA fought a proxy war in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The West, the Muslim world and China supported Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Thousands of Afghans,

Arabs and other Muslims from the rest of the World were encouraged and trained to resist the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan through a program code named operation cyclone costing US\$4 billion.² They were regarded as holy warriors who waged a heroic struggle to end foreign occupation. In March 1985, US President Ronald Regan issued National Security Decision Directive (NSDD 166), which authorized stepped up covert military aid to Mujahideen as well as support to religious indoctrination. Under NSDD 166, the procurement of US weapons Afghan resistance forces increased from 10000 tons of arms and ammunition to 65000 tons by 1987. It was termed as the largest covert operation in US history.³

Pakistan became frontline state in the war between two superpowers in Afghanistan. Pakistan on the one hand got financial and military aid from the West but on the other it faced the Soviet threats, bomb blasts and air violations. This unprecedented development influenced Pakistani society very much. Khyber Pukhtunkhawa FATA and Baluchistan became the transfer routes for assistance to Afghan Mujahideen. An economy based on war and unrest came into being, war lordism flourished and more than 3.5 millions of Afghans took refuge in north western Pakistan. Pakistan helped the people of Afghanistan despite its weak economy.

In resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan religion and nationalism played an important role. The Afghan people gave sacrifices for the sake of their religion, culture and country. Religion and Pukhtunwali are two important traits of Pukhtun society. During this proxy war religious establishment played prominent role in this tragic play. The sacrifices of Afghan people, Pakistan solid support, and successful diplomacy to convince the Muslim World, the West and China in supporting Afghan Mujahideen convinced the Soviets to leave Afghanistan.

After the Soviet withdrawal the Soviet Empire disintegrated. With the disunion of USSR paradigm shift occurred in international politics. The world abandoned

Afghanistan and forgot its people; Pakistan was left alone to deal with more than three million refugees on its soil and thousands of highly motivated and trained Muslim fighters. The US became disengaged from Afghanistan and the developed world neither wholeheartedly funded Afghanistan's reconstruction nor helped in the demobilization of radicalized combatants⁴

Afghanistan turned into backwater and Pakistan was left alone to clean the mess created in the region by the Afghan war. In Pakistan the leadership which steered Pakistan's Afghan policy died in air crash in Bahawalpur on 17 August 1988 and none of the democratic governments in its wake completed its tenures due to which political instability in the country prevailed. In that point in time when important changes were taking place in global political order Pakistan got entangled in the whirlwind of political instability. Though Pakistan invested a lot in the war in Afghanistan but in the end remained empty-handed over and above it inherited a drug-cum-Kalashnikov culture, sectarianism, militancy, a huge bulk of refugees etc.

A wilderness of mirrors:

A new situation arose when the tragic events of 9/11 took place. Under UN auspices the NATO invaded Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11. Pakistan faced new threats on its western borders. During Afghan war in the 1980s Pakistan was a frontline state and after the NATO invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 Pakistan again became a frontline state but this time in a war against global terrorism. It was a war against nameless and faceless, a tournament of shadows, *a wilderness of mirrors, where nothing was what it seemed*.⁵ Terrorism is among the most fluid and dynamic of political phenomena. There is need to objectively and impartially approach the problem because uncritical acceptance of a particular conceptualization has its own perils.⁶ It is pretty clear that the use of the term terrorism depends on one's world view and lies in the eyes of the beholder.

External and internal threats to Pakistan increased. Pakistan always tried to keep relations with other countries on

the basis of mutual respect and mutual interest nevertheless unresolved issues with India, regional countries involvement in Pakistan's internal affairs, resentment in the Muslim World against unjust International Political and Economic Order, the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan exacerbated Pakistan's difficulties. External force can be only successful if there is internal disarray. Internal weaknesses provide opportunity to the external forces to have an axe to grind. Militancy only takes root when other more moderate forms of political contestation are prohibited. Weak political institutions, crisis of governance, leadership crisis, repeated distortion of constitutional rule, creation of a disconnect between the priorities of the state and the interests of the citizen, corruption, use of religion and ethnicity for promoting personal interests, inconsistent national policies, lack of education, lack of justice, social rejection, sectarian violence, gun culture, narcotics, weak economy, energy crisis, unemployment and poverty, has weakened the state. A country suffering from the crisis of legitimacy is neither internally nor externally sovereign.

The menace of militancy has threatened the whole country particularly north west Pakistan. It has harmed Khyber Pukhtunkhawa and FATA. Tribal Areas of are located on the eastern side of the Durand Line-the porous border, between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The political, economic and administrative systems of the areas are legacy of a bygone age of British Raj, when there was a political competition between the then two great powers-British and Russia Empires for the ascendancy in Central Asia. During the "Great Game" the borders of the British India reached the Durand Line while those of the Tsarist Empire halted at the northern bank of the Amu Darya. The Durand Line Border Agreement concluded on November 12th, 1893, between the British Government and Abdul Rehman Khan, Amir of Afghanistan fixing the boundary line from Wakhan in the north to the Iranian border in the south, which has been inherited by Pakistan, the successor State of British India.

Breaking the vicious circle in FATA:

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan are comprised of seven Agencies and six FRs (Frontier Regions). The 1973 constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan made the FATA the constituent part of the federation. After independence in 1947 being part of Pakistan, the FATA has passed through several ups and down in its march in time. The old system of administration continued, FCR (Frontier Crimes Regulation) which was framed by the British in 1901 kept the law and order intact even in the post partition period. Due to the geo-strategic vulnerabilities Pakistan did not integrate FATA politically, legally, socially, and economically with the rest of Pakistani society.⁷ Developments in FATA whether political or economic, social or judicial were slow compared to other parts of the country. Adult franchise was not extended to tribal areas, political agent held enormous powers, Maliki system produced a privileged class, literacy rate remained very low, health facilities were very poor too, and infrastructure did not develop as well, industrialization developed with snail's pace, rampant corruption in the system and pervasive poverty kept the people backward. The writ of courts was not extended to the tribal areas. For almost half a century the people of tribal areas lived under such conditions. The vicious circle of poverty, ignorance and violence continued. In 1996 the federal government of Pakistan decided to introduce adult franchise in the Tribal Areas for the elections held in 1997. The 1997 elections were the first held in the Tribal Areas on the basis of universal adult suffrage. According to the electoral rolls prepared for the 1997 elections, the total number of registered voters was 1.6 million, including 0.4 million female voters.

The post 9/11 international and regional situation influenced the north western region of Pakistan to a great extent. It provided an opportunity to introduce reforms in FATA and bring tribal people at par with people in settled districts. Despite huge funds and international support for the development, poverty alleviation, building democratic institutions, vested interests and the growing syndrome of militancy kept the areas backward. The conflict transition in and the success of

development, democracy and stability in Afghanistan as well as the strengthening of democratic institutions, political stability, and economic development in the settled districts of Pakistan will continue to influence the developments in FATA.

Since joining the alliance against terrorism Pakistan has lost 30,000 innocent civilians and 5,000 military and police officers. Pakistan has suffered more than 300 suicide bomb attacks. It has lost \$100 billion directly in the war effort and tens of billions more in lost foreign investment.⁸ In terms of human loss US has suffered too as US Defence Minister Leon Panetta has said that 1800 US military personnel were killed while 14000 others injured during the decade.⁹

A new geopolitics is underway in the region and hydrocarbon factor in that game is highlighted by many experts on the region. Experts link militancy with oil and gas resources in the region. Afghanistan can become a new transfer route for Central Asian oil and gas. Afghanistan is rich in hydrocarbon. About 2 billion barrels lie under the ground in the northern part of Afghanistan along a narrow strip of land that runs parallel with Turkmen, Uzbek and Tajik borders. Natural gas reserves found in the northern part of the country could approach the 440 billion cubic meters.¹⁰ Insurgency is localized form of terrorism.¹¹ It is an organized rebellion aimed at overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.¹² There is insurgency in Baluchistan which has strategic location besides rich resources. Energy experts underscore that Pakistan's Baluchistan province is estimated to hold 25.1 trillion cubic feet of gas and 6 trillion barrels of oil.¹³

Zero sum game in Afghanistan:

A kind of zero sum game is going on in Afghanistan among the regional as well as great powers particularly China and India. Both are major investors in Afghanistan. India is one of Afghanistan's biggest donors, having pledged \$1.3bn (£854m) for reconstruction¹⁴ Afghanistan and India have signed Strategic Partnership pact and two other pacts on 4 October 2011. As per these agreements India will play bigger role in training Afghan

security forces. One MoU calls for enhanced cooperation in the exploration and production of hydrocarbons, primarily oil and gas. A second MoU, calls for promoting mineral exploration and investment in Afghanistan's mines.¹⁵ The China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) — the largest state-owned Chinese company — has won the rights to explore and develop oil fields in Afghanistan's Amu Darya basin. Amu Darya contains five known fields containing 80 million barrels of crude oil, which amounts to 11,000 barrels per day for 20 years. It is no secret that the Chinese government is interested in Afghanistan's natural resources. In 2007, China won another major tender for the Aynak copper deposit, estimated to be worth \$80bn. China has all weather friendship with Pakistan on the other hand China does seven times more trade with India than it does with Pakistan, and is India's largest trading partner, even over the US.¹⁶ The presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan has been one of the vital factors in militancy in Pakistan. The insurgency that Pakistan faces in Waziristan, and Swat/Malakand, is also a direct consequence of the questionable war being fought against Afghan Taliban on the other side of the Durand Line. Ironically, extremism has made inroads in the region in general and Pakistan in particular since 9/11. Uncertainty, agony and suffering prevail everywhere.¹⁷ On the one hand Pakistan is struggling to regain its writ within its borders and on the other it is striving to rein public resentment against external interference. As recently President of the country has said that Pakistan would not tolerate violations of its sovereignty, even by its allies. "Just as we will not let Pakistani's territory to be used by terrorists for attacks against our people and our neighbours, we cannot allow our territory and our sovereignty to be violated by our friends."¹⁸

Despite meager resources Pakistan is struggling to coop with the problem of militancy. In the north western parts of the country Pakistan army has conducted many military operations for instance Operation zalzala (South Waziristan, 2008)¹⁹, Operation Sirat-e-Mustaqim (Khyber Agency, 2008)²⁰, Operation Sherdil Bajaur Agency, 2008-2009)²¹, Operation Black Thunder Storm (Swat, Buner, Dir, Shangla District, 2009)²² , Operation Raha-e-Rast (Malakand 2009)²³, and

Operation Rah-e-Nijat (South Waziristan 2009)²⁴ to restore government`s writ.

Being an important member of the alliance against global terrorism and being victim of this menace Pakistan needs support of International community on sustained basis in its struggle against violent militancy in the region. And building capacity against underdevelopment is one way out. While some focus on Pakistan`s domestic and foreign policy, societal trends, democratic deficit, and economic conditions as contributors to empowerment of militancy, others search for explanations in the drone attacks by the US troops stationed in Afghanistan and `international conspiracies`. But there is no denying the fact that Pakistanis is going through the most crucial phase in its 64 years of existence.

Reforms are underway in FATA. The Frontier Crimes Regulation is amended as well as the Political Parties Order 2002 is extended to the tribal region. The people of the tribal areas will gradually begin to enjoy all the rights their fellow citizens in the rest of Pakistan do. It appears that the tribunal will evolve into a proper high court. Pakistan`s success in managing militancy in the FATA will depend on the government`s ability to adopt sustainable political and socio-economic measures instead of relying only on military force. Everybody agrees that something should be done, but there is a lack of consensus on the mechanism. The best way to change the system is to go with it and gradually change it. The process of reform should be carried out gradually as without a stable security situation, even the most well-intentioned reforms will fail to deliver.²⁵ The issues should be addressed through tribal traditions.²⁶ Pakistan`s three-pronged military, political, and economic approach to counter-insurgency is a positive step and need to be executed in true spirit. There is need to focus on winning the hearts and minds of the estranged tribal population by developing soft power and working to integrate the region into the federation will help. The government might also marginalize militant organizations by allowing moderate political parties in the FATA.²⁷ The international community should take steps to bring peace in

Afghanistan by creating a “win win” situation for all stakeholders.²⁸

Drug trade and insurgency:

In Afghanistan production of opium has increased in the aftermath of NATO invasion. Afghanistan produces the raw opium used to make 90 percent of the world's heroin. For instance Kandahar itself produced about 16 percent of Afghanistan's opium poppies in 2009²⁹ Pakistan needs to create trust with Afghan populace irrespective of their caste or creed. Meagre Kabul-Jalalabad Highway would not do enough to reach out to the spectacles of Afghan mind. Besides political and military lines there is abundant room along societal welfare line.³⁰ Baluchistan shares a 832 km border with Afghanistan. The border areas are mostly rugged terrain, dotted with mountains and deserts, and sparsely populated on both sides.³¹ Pakistan is also facing problems in areas near the western border lands. In the last few years, Pakistan has deployed more than 140,000 troops to battle the Pakistani Taliban across most of the tribal belt along the Afghan border.³² In Afghanistan one acre of land can produce more than \$4,000 worth of opium. The value of the opium produced in Afghanistan is set to more than double this year (2011) to \$1.4 billion — equal to 9 percent of Afghanistan's entire economy. Helmand Province, the epicenter of opium production, which accounts for about half of Afghanistan's 131,000, cultivated hectares of poppies. The acreage of poppy fields in Helmand shrank by 3 percent from last year, on the other hand in Kandahar Province, adjacent to Helmand, cultivation went up 5 percent this year.³³

Despite billions of dollars poured into Afghanistan since the coalition forces ousted Taliban from power in mid-November 2001, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with half of its 30 million populations living below poverty line. The US provides more than two-thirds of a total of 140,000 foreign troops currently in Afghanistan.³⁴ The United States is spending more than \$100 billion a year in Afghanistan, amounting to about \$2 billion a week and \$8 billion a month.³⁵

Militancy in the FATA is a by-product of the perception that Afghanistan is under foreign occupation and that Pakistan is acting as a “front line” state in support of foreign forces. The primary source of the problem originates in Afghanistan. After the events of 9/11, the U.S. supported the Northern Alliance and defeated the Taliban. Pakistan’s army moved into the FATA in support of NATO and captured many people who were handed over to the U.S. and also took action against the Madaris (Religious seminaries). The role of the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is reduced and foreign agencies have infiltrated the area. Development projects particularly in physical infrastructure, hydro power, minerals, and small scale industries should be launched.³⁶

Violence can never be put to end through violence. It may temporarily suppress the terrorist but will never put a complete end to their activity. There is only one military option and that is peaceful use mean deployment of Army in the troubled areas to build schools, hospitals, establish business opportunities, judicial system for visible justice, law enforcement agencies, jobs opportunities and above all gaining the confidence and trust of the general public by making them believe that it is their army. Force may be necessary to forestall terrorists’ attacks or apprehend them wherever possible, but the use of force will be effective only if it is used as part of a strategy which also deals with underlying causes.

Putting house in order:

Grievances, discrimination, poverty, socio-economic deprivations and extremely poor governance structures to a great extent explain the emergence and existence of militancy.³⁷ Political collapse, corruption, failure to meet the needs of the people, sectarian violence, gun culture, narcotics, distortion of constitutional rule, creation of disconnect between the priorities of the state and the interests of the citizen are some of the threats Pakistan is still facing.³⁸ Violent militancy only takes root when other more moderate forms of political contestation are prohibited and that the upsurge in radicalization is a grassroots response to local authoritarian rule.³⁹

The problem of insurgency can well be tackled by political dialogue and not through force. Trust building grows out of the evaluation of a system based on the peoples' expectations, experiences and beliefs. Not one but many factors account for the process of trust building, but important ones are legitimacy of the rulers; the relationship of the governed and governors; and the functionary role of its major governing agencies which in modern polity can be grouped into executive, judiciary and legislature etc. Pakistani society needs strong political institutions and rule of law to make the alien class as participant. There is no denying the fact that in the absence of identity, development is highly unlikely. Least dependency, good governance and broad-based representative government with political tolerance can lead to betterment in instability.⁴⁰

The factor of utmost importance is the nation's well power and morale-the character of people, their moral purpose and mission. It is the socio-psychological factors which play a prominent role in national survival and prosperity.⁴¹ Militancy is the symptom of a malaise that feeds on perceived political and economic inequities. Until the causes are redressed the symptoms will keep reappearing.⁴² The international community may help promote latent interdependence within the larger region through the power of trade, economic opportunity, and gas pipelines in order to change the structure of state-to-state relations and create a popular stake in peace and stability.⁴³ Steady engagement will advance human rights and democratization more effectively than punitive measures.⁴⁴ Convergence on cooperation rather than focus on clash of civilizations will enable people to coop with the problems of fear, poverty, and disease. Unless the war against militancy becomes a comprehensive global, regional and national effort, employing political, economic, military and cultural means it will be highly unlikely to win hearts and minds of the people.

Conclusion:

The problem of insurgency in North West Pakistan is not simple but complex phenomenon. It is the product of international, regional, national and local developments for the

last couple of decades. Pakistan is going through the most crucial phase in its 64 years of existence. It came into existence after a peaceful and constitutional struggle. The problem of insurgency can well be tackled by political dialogue and not through force. Political, economic and social reforms are needed to end the deprivations of people living in the insurgency hit areas. Capacity building and strengthening of institutions will help overcoming the problem of violent militancy. Strong and friendly relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan will help in keeping both sides of the Durand line politically stable and peaceful. Regional integration through roads, pipelines, trade and economic opportunities will be a quantum jump in restoring regional peace and stability. The financial support of International community of the projects for development and prosperity of the troubled areas of Pakistan will be another effective way to deal with underlying causes of regional insurgency. The government should launch and donors should support meaningful dialogue for political, economic, social and legal reforms that would encourage political unity in diversity, economic development and social equality in FATA, KPK and other less developed areas to ensure that the most affected people by conflict become the main beneficiaries of the developmental projects. Throughout its checkered history Pakistan has faced many problems nonetheless succeeded in its resolution. It neither succumbed to external aggressions nor compromised on its writ within its geographical boundaries.

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