

FATA a Breeding Ground of Extremism in Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan's current socio-economic and security issues are mainly the product of the rise of the militant brand of religious extremism. There are different explanations for the reasons of such trend in the Pakistani society. Issues of education, employment, poverty and religious seminaries etc are often cited as the core reasons behind this tendency. A very significant factor which has been ignored in most of the literature and which is comparatively less researched upon is the origin of the issue and try to find out the reasons in the areas of Pakistan where first this menace emerged i-e Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The paper is an attempt to analyze the rising religious militant extremism in its heartland, FATA.

Key Words: FATA, Pakistan, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Militants

Ever since its independence Pakistan has been facing serious security threats which mostly were external but lately along with external threats Pakistan now faces grave internal threats also, these include extremism, sectarianism, ethnicity, political instability, inflation, corruption and many many more. Amongst these the most crucial and serious security concern for Pakistan nowadays is growing militant extremism, which has badly damaged the over all social fabric of Pakistan and has brought about severe cleavages in an already divided society. The militancy and radicalization of religion has not only created domestic security concerns but has also brought about a poor image of Pakistan at the international level. The extremist elements are involved in terrorist activities all over Pakistan leaving no place or no person safe. Earlier the militant radical elements which were mostly based in FATA areas have now spread out along with their terrorist activities all over the country. They have been successful in carrying

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out, suicide attacks in nearly all major cities of the country, which has left the whole society terrorized. Fear prevails and there is feeling of immense insecurity at all levels of society.

FATA is a semi-autonomous region in the North West of Pakistan having unique social and political setup. It consists of seven tribal agencies namely: Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, South Waziristan and North Waziristan. FATA got fame ever since US led global War on Terrorism was launched by the then president of USA George W. Bush in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 terror incidents in USA. Soon after these incidents, George W. Bush declared that:

“Our 'war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.”
(Bush, 2001).

Even though he never gave any time frame and the actual scope of the War but it was clearer than crystal even at that time that his administration wanted to defeat al-Qaeda and its patrons in Afghanistan-the Taliban. It is in this context that the US government deemed essential the support of Pakistan-chief patron of Taliban at that time. However, there were other reasons also as to why support from Pakistan was considered vital. These included intelligence cooperation to target al-Qaeda and Taliban militants, provide logistic support and stop support for Taliban from military establishment as well as from the Pushtun population of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in the North West of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan. Pakistan, under severe US pressure and incentives, agreed to all of these demands. The reason why US feared the support of tribesmen for the Afghan Taliban, was rooted in the fact that in the civil war with the Northern Alliance, these tribes fought for the Taliban and they had particularly good relations with al-Qaeda elements who now started living their lives here in this region.

“Initially, the Taliban forces appeared to be fatally damaged. Slowly, they started recovering; militancy spread and intensified in the bordering FATA regions”.
(Khan, 2011: 211).

Such close relationship had given a window of opportunity to Afghan Taliban to take refuge in the FATA region after the fall of Kabul in generally and particularly after the famous Battle at Tora Bora area at the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Taliban and al-Qaeda elements were suspected to have fled from Afghanistan into Pakistan's border areas comprising of Tribal Agencies collectively known as FATA. Consequently, US pressure grew on Pakistan to send its troops in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan, though Pakistani forces have never entered this area since the country's independence in 1947.

Military deployment in FATA

Traditionally the tribesmen used to defend the area themselves and Pakistan as such never felt security threats from its western border, despite the fact that there was hostile relationship between the two neighboring states most of the times. This point was emphasized by General Pervez Musharraf just three weeks before the September 11 terrorist attacks in USA. While addressing the tribal elders, he praised them by recalling their efforts and struggle for independence and later on the security of Pakistan (Rana; Sial, Basit, 2010: 69). But things changed very soon and thus the decision of the then army chief and President General Pervez Musharraf under US pressure, had to send Pak army in South Waziristan in 2002 and the establishment of 185 check posts along the Pak-Afghan border, had long term implications for the Pakistan's security and many analysts consider the roots of current insurgency in that particular step (Ghauri, 2009: 7). There is nonetheless fact that since then these areas remain turbulent pitting Pakistan Army against the local, sometimes foreign, militants or Taliban.

As mentioned earlier that after the Tora Bora battle, the al-Qaeda and Taliban militants fled to tribal areas given refuge by their local sympathizers. (Orakzai, et.al, 2009).

Most of the foreigners based themselves in South Waziristan given by local Ahmadzai Wazirs who had developed good relationship with them since the Afghan Jihad in 1980s (Qazi, 2011: 3).

From this place, the militants waged war against the US forces and the new afghan government headed by President Hamid Karzai. (Irfan, 2009).

US in relation opted for strong pressures on Pakistan to deny safe heavens to these terrorists and even threatened to use unilateral force if things were not altered.

The Pakistani government tried to convince the tribesmen of the gravity of the situation and requested them to deny shelter to the Afghanistan based Taliban and foreign militants. The tribesmen considered this request to be the charter of demand not from Pakistan government but from US government, which according to the tribesmen was the government which had recently toppled the Islamic government in Afghanistan. Second reason for the reluctance was the close relationship which had developed between the local tribesmen and the foreign militants since the days of Afghan Jihad of 1980s. Therefore, they were reluctant to accept it and this created further tension in the area and there were several incidents of cross fire between the local militants and the security forces. (Ghauri, 2009).

When these small measures of the security forces failed and the militants' activities increased day by day, the government started again the policy rapprochement towards the militants. This policy resulted in some agreements in the coming months between the security forces and the local tribesmen. This policy continued until 2004 but it was felt in the security establishment that this policy instead of bringing peace has emboldened the militants who have spread their activities and influence using these agreements.

Wana Operation of 2004 and subsequent developments

The government of Pakistan besides using the agreements for peace, used the local political administration and also the local tribal elders, with the financial support from USA distributed a large sum of money to the tribesmen as to get their support against the al-Qaeda militants and also buy their loyalties in favor of the government. The aim of the plan was to alienate the foreigners (the term is used for al-Qaeda militants) in the tribal areas. But this policy failed miserably and most of the money provided was kept by the tribal elders themselves.

Now the government had no other option except to use force against the militants. The operation was aimed at targeting militants based on in the agency headquarter of South Waziristan Agency, Wana. This was the first full scale military operation against the militants in tribal

areas that left long term implications. The operation was launched in March 2004 in which US provided the key intelligence using satellite technology. The operation killed 63 militants mostly Uzbeks and Chechans while 46 military and para-military personals were also killed in the operation. The government declared this operation a success while militants claimed their own success by stating that they killed more than 1000 troops. When the operation was halted in the area, an un-written agreement was carried out between the security forces (Peshawar Corpe Commander) and the local militants represented by Nek Mohammad on 27 March 2004. (As if Hell, 2010: 36).

The agreement took place in Shakai, the hometown of Nek Mohammad, in the South Waziristan Agency, therefore the agreement is known as Shakai Agreement.

The agreement was meant to stop the attacks on Pakistan Army and attacks inside Afghanistan by the tribal militants and to stop the tribesmen from giving refuge to the foreign militants. In return, Pakistani government was to withdraw the Army from the area and release the arrested tribesmen and provide assurance that it will compensate for the economic losses of the tribesmen. (Mohmand & Qadir, 2007: 5).

But this deal proved short lived and the sporadic fighting continued to take place in different parts of Waziri area of the South Waziristan Agency. In the same year (reference), US targeted the head of Waziri militant and the representative of the local militants-Nek Muhammad through a missile attack, presumably the first drone attack inside Pakistan (some accounts suggest he was killed by a hellfire missile launched from somewhere in Arabian Sea or by a smart bomb). It was believed in the security circles that Nek Muhammad was the main problem and his removal from the scene would prove a fatal blow to the militancy in the region generally and particularly to the Waziri militancy. This assumption, however, proved wrong with the emergence of Abdullah Mehsud, a veteran fighter in Afghan Jihad who was initially captured by US troops from Afghanistan and shifted to Guantanamo Bay for interrogation in 2002 but later was released in 2004. His involvement in the abduction of two Chinese engineers who were working on Gomal Zam Dam in NWFP, had given him a bad name in the area and later he blew himself up after he was surrounded by the security forces in Zoab district of Baluchistan province that borders the South Waziristan Agency.

The second most important tribe-Mehsud, particularly its youth, were being affected by this scenario and the feeling of hatred was being developed in them against the Army mainly because of the operations by the later in the area, although the Mehsuds generally remained indifferent to Army action against the Wazirs (Nawaz, 2009: 18).

There were some sporadic clashes between the security forces and the Mehsud tribesmen, particularly the youth, at the border areas of Waziri and Mehsud tribal areas in the South Waziristan Agency. The conflict gradually spread to other areas of Mehsud territory. But this was something which concerned the security officials who wanted to avoid widening the area of operation. Second reason for this reluctance was the difficult terrain of the Mehsud area which was covered by thick forests and difficult mountainous region unlike the Waziri area where it was comparatively easy for the government to conduct military operation. This new development forced the local administration to try another deal with the Ahmadzai Wazirs so that now they could focus on the Mehsud challenge, which was led by then little known Baitullah Mehsud. Due to efforts of the then governor of NWFP Syed Iftikhar Hussain Gilani, the Political Agent of the Mohmand Agency and ISI, the government made another deal with the Ahmadzai Wazir in South Waziristan Agency in November 2004.

With each passing day, pressure increased on the militants particularly foreign militants to vacate the area by the government through small army operations. As a result, most of the foreign militants started shifting themselves to the adjacent North Waziristan Agency which is inhabited by two important tribes-Dawar and Wazir. The increasing number of militants, particularly the presence and activities of the foreigners forced the government to deploy the troops in the North Waziristan Agency, although there were already forces present at the border with Afghanistan to stop cross border movements of militants on pressure from the US government. The foreign militants adopted themselves according to the local culture and appearances so as to hide their identity in the area. The operation in the agency started in September 2005 against al-Qaeda linked foreign militants-top among them being the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and its head Tahir Yuldashev who was suspected to be based in the area. Small scale operations continued but the foreign militants continued to enjoy the local support in the area.

Meanwhile, the government started negotiating with the Mehsud militants led by Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan Agency in order to force him to disband his support for the foreign militants and his activities inside and across the border. An agreement was signed in this regard with Baitullah Mehsud on Feb 22, 2005 in line with its agreement with Wazir tribes in South Waziristan Agency. US government was highly critical of this and other agreements by the government of Pakistan and the militants. (As if Hell, 2010: 36).

The agreement was signed in Sararogha, native town of Baitullah and the stronghold of Mehsud militants. This agreement had significant impact on the later development as it has gave Baitullah much prominence and he now became virtual ruler of the area. He started running parallel administration and tried to enforce shariah in the region in which he was by and large successful. He declared himself to be Ameer ul Momineen.

Formation of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and spreading of Talibanization

With agreements in both the centers of militancy i.e., South Waziristan agency and North Waziristan Agency, the militants were at large re-grouping themselves and consolidating their position in the tribal society and started using Shariah as the main reason for their continued activities that were militant in nature on different platforms. Therefore it was felt that the militants should form a common front against the existing challenges. It is in this context that he established Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan, commonly known as TTP on December 14, 2007 in Ladha, South Waziristan and he himself became the Ameer of TTP. (Zaidi, 2008:76).

The main objectives of TTP were: resistance against the Pakistan Army, implementation of Shairah in the region, and forming a united front against the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan in Pakistan's tribal areas. (Alan, 2010).

TTP, though formed by militants from South Waziristan, have expanded to all other agencies in a short span of time. Besides, it has its presence in all six Frontier regions as well as some of the settled districts of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (NWFP at that time). Consequently the operations of TTP have also expanded in almost in all parts of the country mainly targeting the security forces and some foreign targets.

Different analysts present different reasons for this rapid growth of Talibanization. The main reason for this growth of militancy particularly in South Waziristan Agency, however, is the military operations conducted by the Army. These operations were conducted without considering the ground realities. The tribes have never witnessed the boots of Army on its soil since the creation of Pakistan and they have been the first line of defense on western border of Pakistan for decades. Therefore, their loyalty for Pakistan is beyond any doubt. It is in this context that Pakistani and US security and intelligence establishment have chosen these people to fight against Soviet threat. These people were too simple and too naïve in the art of diplomacy to understand the geo-strategic shift in the region and when Pakistan Army, with pressure from US, tried to force these people to change their behavior, they turned their guns against them.

Khyber and Kurram agencies have initially witnessed sectarian conflicts between Deobandi-Barelvi and Shia-sunni in respective agencies. In Khyber Agency two rival factions Lashkar e Islam and Ansar ul Islam, representing Deobandi and Barelvi sects of Islam have been fighting each other since 2003. (As if Hell, 2010: 20).

On the other hand, Shia Turi and Sunni Bangash tribes are fighting a bloody sectarian war against each other since 2007, although they have history of conflict but this conflict is unprecedented in its scope, duration and destruction. (As if Hell, 2010).

The main reason for conflict in both these regions still remains the same, however, the Taliban have also become party over the period of time and have benefited from political and power vacuum in the agencies. The conflict in both the agencies represents overall hostile behavior of these sects against each other in the entire country. The Shia-sunni sectarian strife has been present in Pakistan since 1980s. Deobandi-Barelvi hostility is a relatively new development and emerged in the late 1990s. The conflict in both these agencies, have been aggravated, to some extent, by the support each group gets from its patron from the entire country and sometimes outside the country.

Bajaur and Mohmand agencies are in the extreme north of FATA and are very important base for militants related to TTP. Before the emergence of TTP, both agencies had militants belonging to Tehrik e Nifaz e Shariat e Mohammadi (TNSM), a religio-militant organization based in Malakand region that borders Bajaur agency. About 5000

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TNSM militants have gone to Afghanistan in October 2001 to fight against the US forces in support of Afghan Taliban government. (Qazi, 2011: 5).

The turning point in the agency came when US drone destroyed a local seminary, headed by TNSM senior leader, killing along with him, 80 other persons mostly children from age 8 to 21 years. (Tribune, August 12, 2011).

Most of the local people believed that this was just like any other seminary providing religious education to the poor children from different parts of the FATA and Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. The security forces and US officials are of the opinion that all those killed were militants getting training in the seminary. This incident enraged the local tribesmen to the extent that just few days after wards, local militant commander belonging to TTP, Moulvi Faqir Muhammad, convened a gathering of tribesmen of more than 2000 in strength, there he declared that all these 2000 persons are suicide bombers who will take revenge of this attack from the government of Pakistan and the security forces. (Covert Drone War, 2011, August 10).

Just few days later his remarks could be seen translated into action when a suicide bomber blew himself up targeting a military training centre in Dargai, near Bajaur agency killing dozens of soldiers. Militancy expanded rapidly after this incident and Moulvi Faqeer Mohammad, TTP leader in Bajaur emerged as the powerful militant commander and later would become the spokesperson of TTP chief, Baitullah Mehsud. Resultantly military operation was launched against TTP in Bajaur in 2008 which continues even today. (Irfan, 2009).

On contrary, conflict in Mohmand agency mainly started in response to operation of Pakistan Army against the clerics of Lal Mosque in the capital of Pakistan in 2007, which killed the top cleric of the mosque, Abdul Rasheed Ghazi. Soon after this incident, about 200 armed men led by little known person at that time, commander Omar Khalid attacked and captured the shrine of a very famous anti-British fighter Haji Sahid Torangzai and renamed a nearby mosque 'Lal Mosque'. It was symbolic name given as to show solidarity and to begin a holy war from it. Resultantly Pakistan Army launched first major operation against his militants in 2008 and the small operations continue to take place in region.

US Drone Attacks in FATA

When Taliban regime in Kabul was toppled by Northern Alliance with the help of American and NATO forces, the surviving Taliban fled to hilly areas situated on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Taliban which were a mixed lot hailing from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Arab countries and Central Asian states. They took hide in hilly areas, here they took shelter and consolidated themselves, they shared a common objective of throwing foreign forces out of Afghanistan. Mainly Taliban were Pashtuns belonging to those tribes who live on both sides of border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, they after the end of their government, got mixed up with Pakhtun population in FATA and adjoining areas of Afghanistan. After consolidating and re-organizing themselves, they occasionally would enter into Afghanistan and attack American and NATO forces. In retaliation the US CIA used unmanned drones to attack hideouts of Taliban and their supporters within Pakistan territory. These drone attacks not only kill Taliban fighters but also damage civilian property and non-combatant people in the vicinity. This is also violation of Pakistani sovereignty and that of international law. On the issue Pakistani nation including media, intellectuals and civil society are raising hue and cry. They have protested many times, condemning the attacks. Americans are of the view that Pakistan has granted them permission to pursue the Taliban fighters and eliminate them by drone attacks. But there is not such agreement in black and white.

Estimated Total Deaths from U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan, 2004 - 2011

	Deaths (low)	Deaths (high)
2011*	281	407
2010	607	993
2009	369	725
2008	274	314
2004-2007	89	112
Total	1,620	2,551

**Through July 14, 2011*

**Estimated Militant Deaths from U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan
2004 - 2011**

	Deaths (low)	Deaths (high)
2011*	265	371
2010	581	939
2009	266	502
2008	134	165
2004-2007	81	103
Total	1,282	2,015

**Through July 14, 2011*

**Estimated Militant Leader Deaths from US Drone Strikes in
Pakistan, 2004-2011**

2011	2
2010	12
2009	7
2008	11
2004-2007	3
Total	35

**Through July 14, 2011. Included in estimated militants and estimated totals, above.*

Source: <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones/2007>

Conclusion

The implications and consequences of militant extremism are very critical and grave for Pakistan's internal as well as external security. The joining of US War on Terror has brought out disastrous effects on Pakistan security as the uncontrolled militant groups got access to FATA first and then spread out to the major settled areas of Pakistan and very soon it was realized in Pakistan that this US War on Terror has actually become Pakistan's own war. In its history, Pakistan is facing the toughest challenge to its security due to the on going militant extremism. At present there seems to be no relief rather there seems to be an enormous increase in the terrorist activities and expansion of militant extremism in Pakistan. Talibanization has become a menace in Pakistan. Serious security threats by these militants have made Pakistan fragile and weak. The military forces of Pakistan along with

their regular security role are now also involved in carrying military operations against the terrorist's outfits and as a backlash of these military operations, the terrorists activities of militants have increased and have become more fatal.

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