

IMPACT OF TERRORISM AND RELIGIOUS RADICALISM ON ASIAN SECURITY: CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN'S TRIBAL REGIONS (FATA)

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I. General

Terrorism and radicalism are on the upswing in Asia. Specifically, Pakistan is the worst hit since many years. The military operations in FATA started in 2004 and have continued ever since. Despite deploying about 100,000 troops and plans to raise more units and train FC forces there are some doubts if the situation would be normalized soon. In addition Pakistan has opened many check posts and crossing areas in the difficult border region. Also, it has floated proposals to Afghan government of sealing the Pak-Afghan borders and selective mining to prevent cross- border infiltration.

It is for the first time in Pakistan's history that this region has achieved global attention. For the first time any government in Pakistan's history has tried to extend its writ in the peripheral regions of the northwest country by sending armed forces and then undertaking ambitious development work. No doubt, this action was precipitated by developments following Afghan Jihad and then precipitated by 9/11 events, when many Taliban elements along with foreign militants crossed over into border regions adjoining Pakistan and sought sanctuary. Given the porous nature of the border (approx 2,750 kms) and the most difficult and treacherous terrain, it is indeed a challenging task for any army to cope with the situation. Besides, NATO-led ISAF and US forces in Afghanistan are severely handicapped for a variety of reasons and are unable to adequately control the situation. The Karzai government, too, faces a virtual paralysis in exercising control and governance outside some areas in the north. Moreover, the undefined Durand line and straddling of divided

tribes on both sides of the border along Afghanistan and FATA regions makes the situation more complex.

The presence of armed forces in the region for the first time to extend the writ of the state is a significant and welcome development, though the results achieved have not been quite satisfactory. Lately, since the last one year or so, the guerrilla activity has in FATA has increased and spilled over into three settled areas of Swat.

The army has launched a fresh military operation after imposition of November 3 emergency in the country and is confident that within a month or so the area would be cleared of insurgent activity and normalcy restored. In this regard, the government has expressed its resolve to raise more forces, train FC and send them to quell the insurgency in the region. In order to bring the regions to some semblance of normalcy, the government has to do some serious and hard thinking. The following suggestions may be helpful:

A. Improving Military Measures

1. Raising of new troops with state of the art equipment, especially to fight in mountain/ guerrilla warfare during day and night are important.

2. Pakistan army has hitherto been trained mostly to fight conventional wars in the plains/desert regions against India. Thus, there is a need to train officers in special mountain warfare, especially in guerrilla /counter-insurgency warfare like the Indian army fighting in its northeast.

3. Tighter coordination amongst NATO-Afghan-Pakistani forces has to be institutionalized through better intelligence and experience-sharing mechanisms.

4. There is a need to boost and improve human and aerial day and night reconnaissance.

5. Targeted and pinpointed operations, after obtaining correct and timely intelligence, must be launched to completely destroy insurgents/ installations instead of resorting to sweeping/flushing out operations that kill civilians, innocent women and children, property and public installations.

6. Heavy reliance on aerial bombardment (to save own casualties as NATO troops are doing in Afghanistan) should be minimized, as this leads to collateral damage and increases the general public resentment and alienation against the national forces.

7. A proper warning/ intimation should be given to the area residents to evacuate when operations are to be carried out. (This step is being taken in Swat).

8. Generous compensation packages and medical facilities should be provided to civilians who are by chance caught and suffer in the fighting.

9. After a decision has been taken, the military operations must be taken to their logical conclusion in completely destroying rebel elements and their strongholds through all possible military means (sealing escape routes and isolating them).

10. The military reconstruction teams (army and civil engineers) must immediately be mobilized to re-build and rehabilitate destroyed property, roads, and infrastructure of the area before the occupants are resettled. In the meantime, the displaced persons should be properly looked after in camps while the military operations last.

11. Before, during, and after any military operations, the Psywar section of the army should be properly mobilized to explain the rationale, intentions and nature of the military action. As the tribesmen are not very educated and have been susceptible to propaganda of religious leaders and warlords, they should be persuaded that the government is stabilizing the region for *their development and uplift*.

12. Troops undergoing these operations must be briefed on the sensitivity of these operations. As they involve fighting own nationals. Officers, JCOs and soldiers should be taught basic primers on how to conduct counter-insurgency operations against *own* people and lessons learnt from different examples in other countries.

13. Preferably troops undertaking these operations should be from that area, as they know the language, geography and customs of the people and to avoid any special ethnic imputation.

14. The military operations must be forceful, speedy focused and not linger on, as it can be counter-productive.

15. Media should be prevented from reporting military these events in national interest.

B. Strengthening Socio-political Political Measures

Military means should provide time and space for later following up by diplomatic-political means to resolve conflicts of such nature. Military force is but one of the instruments to realize the objective and has to be supplemented with full economic and political measures. The following guidelines are suggested:

III. POLICY GUIDELINES

1. Due to peculiar geography and co-ethnic tribes living side by side of the border, it is sometimes difficult to exactly spot out the ‘enemy’. The Taliban elements generally enjoy substantial support and sympathy from amongst their own people of the area. The reasons are not far to seek: US military occupation in Afghanistan, general perception that Gen Musharraf government is doing this at the US behest for self-perpetuation in power, and experience of long jihad reinforce this. Providing some form of local governmental structure in the name of *Sharia*, terrorizing the public, constant stream of Islamist propaganda — all have created deep alienation against the government. Besides, USA and Pakistan governments’ policies of earlier sympathetic promotion of Taliban has started taking its toll. Some areas in North and South Waziristan and, now in Swat were troubled since many years. And the MMA government was either condoning or was complicit in the actions of some Islamist groups. E.g., the unchecked broadcasting by FM radios for many years and imposition of Shariat has taken many years. It has therefore built a large support base in these areas. That is why; the government security personnel sent on military operations were prone to surrender without fighting their co-religionists.

2. After these areas are cleared of Taliban/Al-Qaeda elements, fast-track development should be undertaken and safe zones set up and where civil administration structures are beefed up.

3. In order to win ‘hearts and minds’ of the locals, the government will have to negotiate with the Taliban elements at some stage who are generally moderate. However, these moderate elements have to be identified first and supported after isolating them from the hardliners.

4. Increased use of mediation through conventional dispute-resolution system such as traditional *Jirga* should be utilized with some modifications by incorporating elders and notables.

5. All foreign and local radio broadcasts should be banned and government media should extend its reach there.

6. Special economic zones /autonomous zone should be explored to dilute militant/separatist tendencies such as India has employed with some modicum of success in its northeastern troubled regions.

7. All funding sources of tribal people who send money through drug mafia, certain Al-Qaeda groups, or tribal people working in the Gulf or elsewhere in Pakistan should be monitored and stopped.

8. Instead these funds could be channelized under some scheme for their development. Government schemes like Tribal Agencies Development Authority should be launched where locals have major input.

9. Foreign militants should be evicted through the cooperation of locals through a reward system.

10. In order to win “hearts and minds” the armed forces in alliance with the government should immediately launch short-term gestation welfare projects: schools, colleges, farming, local industry, hospitals, and water works irrigation network.

11. Local administrative and judiciary should be re-vamped.

13. There is great potential in investing in gemstone industry, marble, hydropower, coal, forestry dry fruit, farming and tourism. They should be encouraged.

14. Political parties must be allowed to operate in the region.

15. Check posts and crossing points must be manned and strictly monitored.

16. Efforts must be made to indoctrinate the tribesmen on the positive aspects and benefits of integration into the mainstream of national life than living in present tribal status or fighting. For this, sociologists and scholarly studies are needed.

17. Since the tribal youth have been motivated over decades on the script of Jihad the government should launch some special schemes to harness their energies towards constructive channels and wean them away from the business of fighting. This could mean construction brigades, building farming teams and setting up local businesses and cottage industries.

18. Efforts should be made to control drug-related money; if poppy crop cannot be easily substituted, efforts should be made to set up pharmaceutical industries in the regions that could use these products for exports.

19. Refugees should be repatriated from Pakistan soon as their continued presence is posing a security problem.

20. Cooperation with Central Asian governments is necessary to tighten transfer of drugs, militants and arms across borders.

21. Indian activities through their consulates in Cars and Afghanistan must be closely monitored. If they cannot be prevented from functioning, at

least Pakistan should increase its healthy presence in Afghanistan and effectively counter Indian propaganda. It should increase aid, trade and engage in developmental work that reflects its genuine interest in the well being of the Afghan people.

22. Special economic packages and development plans must be launched in the areas to bring them at par with settled regions to alleviate their sense of deprivation.

23. Building of gas pipelines option should be pursued despite disturbed conditions in Afghanistan. These could provide a stake for building peace and development in the region.

II. Conclusion

The tools and mechanism adopted by armed forces through economic packages, truce and negotiations, albeit creditworthy, have not worked effectively in face of lack of coordination and synergy in military and political means. Due to certain steps like the Lal Masjid affair there has been a spate of suicidal attacks on military personnel and military targets throughout the country in the last six months. Certain areas in Swat have come under Taliban /Al-Qaeda control.

A judicious mix of coercion and cajoling is essential. Political means should be followed up vigorously after termination of military operations. The FATA regions, given their warlike history and difficult terrain, are one of the most difficult areas to be tackled in the world. It is by no means an easy task for any army. And there is no immediate solution. The emphasis therefore should be to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the people in the FATA region by ridding the region of militants, cutting their sources of funding and undertaking fast development work and giving the locals a stake in the federation. Deeds should speak louder than words.

Realistically speaking, we have to live with foreign forces (US and NATO) in the region for the foreseeable future. This would continue to feed anti-US sentiment in Afghanistan and the adjoining FATA regions. However, as part of Pakistan’s territory it is crucial to establish the writ of the state and wean the region away from negative influences by winning their hearts and minds.

Any half-hearted measures would only complicate matters and endanger national integrity. Pakistan’s major locus of threat now has shifted from India in the west to its troubled western regions, where many “foreign hands” may be at work to destabilize the country.

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