

Deconstructing the Myth: Nature of Terrorism in the Pakhtun Region (2001-2013)

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Abstract

The current study is an attempt to identify the true nature of terrorism in the Pakhtun region that mainly took place during 2001-2013. Although the study heavily relies on secondary data analysis, however numerous unstructured interviews and group discussions with experts has also been carried out to thoroughly understand the issue at hand. The study finds that terrorism in the Pakhtun region has neither been a struggle for the imposition of Sharia nor a Pakhtun nationalist movement. Based on the investigation of the available literature, the study concludes that it has been a politically motivated struggle for the acquisition of power. The study suggests that the writ of the state should be implemented in letter and spirit in the erstwhile FATA region.

Key Words: Terrorism, Insurgency, Taliban, Nature, Pakhtun Region, Pakistan

Introduction

The issue of identifying the actual nature of terrorism prevailed in the Pakhtun region has generated a hot debate among analysts around the world. It is generally believed that it is an Islamist-jihadist movement, inspired by the short but effective Taliban rule in Afghanistan (1996-2001) and supported by Al Qaeda for the ultimate purpose of establishing *Shariah* not only in the Pakhtun region but in Pakistan and the whole world. However, the task has been made difficult by many factors. First of all, as this terrorism mainly took place on the Pakhtun land and was dominated in most cases by ethnic Pakhtuns, therefore, instead of simply labelling it as Islamist militancy, it leads to suspicion. This is because Pakhtuns have a long history of struggling with the federation. This was evident from 1947 towards the mid-1970s when the Afghan state was supporting Pakhtun nationalists in Pakistan and Afghanistan for achieving an independent state, the Pakhtunistan (Gul, 2009). Therefore, although with the passage of time, the Pakhtuns have fully integrated with Pakistan, any uprising having a significant number of Pakhtuns will resurrect that doubt among the minds of the Punjabi dominated Pakistani establishment (Ijaz Khan personal communication, February 1, 2012). A related issue is Pakhtuns' history of defending their soil. Never in history has the Pakhtun region, including Afghanistan, been permanently occupied by a foreign power. Therefore, the present insurgency is considered by some as an attempt to free the Pakhtun land from a foreign power, the United States of America, and the Taliban uprising is termed as a Pakhtun nationalist movement.

Though terrorism has been mainly taking place on the Pakhtun land, it has not been entirely dominated by the Pakhtuns. The Taliban were joined by militants from other ethnicities as well, like the Punjabis (Gul, 2009). There are non-Pakhtun groups active in the region too. Prominent among them are Al Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and the Haqqani Network, led by Sirajuddeen Haqqani, the son

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of the former Afghan warlord, Jalaluddin Haqqani (Wadhams & Cookman, 2009). The Taliban themselves do not act coherently. Although they are grouped under an umbrella organization, the TTP, most of the Taliban leaders act independently in their own respective areas (Fair, 2011). The second section identifies the current militant landscape of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The section explores the profile and composition of different Taliban and non-Taliban militants in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. To understand the nature, it is imperative to know the aims and objectives of the militants. Therefore, the third section critically analyzes the objectives of different militant groups operating in the Pakhtun region. The fourth section is a narration of the factors which led to the Talibanization of the Pakhtun society. Only after analyzing the composition of the insurgency, the objectives of the militants, and the contributing factors in the rise of Talibanization in the Pakhtun society that the true nature of the current insurgency in the Pakhtun region becomes clear. There is an ongoing debate about equating the current militancy with Pakhtun nationalism. An attempt is made in the last section to prove this contention wrong.

Militant Landscape of the Pakhtun Region

The Pakhtun region is home to a diverse range of terrorist groups, having different objectives and asserting varying degrees of influence. There are groups having international agendas and composed of foreign terrorists who may be using the area as a safe haven. Al Qaeda, mainly composed of Arabs and Central Asians, and having a jihadist agenda that transcends state boundaries, is a clear example of a foreign terrorist organization that is based in FATA. Another FATA-based foreign terrorist organization is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Then there are groups composed of local Taliban elements and focused on Pakistan and/or Afghanistan like the TTP and non-Taliban groups like that of Hafiz Gulbahadar, Mullah Nazir and the Haqqani Network.

Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda, which was established in 1988 in Peshawar under the leadership of Osama bin Laden is certainly the most influential international terrorist organization that is using FATA as a safe haven. It was the successful Afghan jihad of the 1980s that encouraged Osama bin Laden and the Egyptian medical doctor, and the Afghan war veteran, Aiman al Zawahiri, to form such an organization (Jones, 2010). In that jihad, Osama bin Laden and other *mujahideen* were heavily supported by the US and Pakistan to fight the Soviet forces. The Afghan jihad had given Osama such power and prestige as an international jihadist that he had to channel those energies to some other power after the withdrawal of the Communist forces from Afghanistan. His obvious choice was the United States of America, for its perceived anti-Islamic role around the world and its support to the state of Israel.

Al Qaeda is basically a *Sunni Wahabi-Salafi* organization that draws its leadership and resources mainly from the wealthy Arab states. It considers the Christian-Judaists dominated the western world as an enemy of Islam and jihad against them as the primary responsibility of the *Ummah* (Community of the believers) (Jones, 2010). At the same time, it wants a regime change in the Middle East to bring an end to the 'corrupt', 'dictatorial', and 'un-Islamic' systems in the region (Bjorgo, 2005).

Al Qaeda was held responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks by the US; therefore, Afghanistan was invaded in October 2001 to disrupt the Taliban regime that was hosting the Al Qaeda fugitives and destroy the terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan. As a result of the attack, Al Qaeda had no other option but to take refuge in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Although hundreds of its leaders have been captured by Pakistan and handed over to the US since then, however, the organization has firmly established itself in the region. It not only coordinates its activities in FATA but trains and equips Afghan and Pakistani Taliban groups to fight the US-NATO forces in Afghanistan. In fact, other local Taliban and non-Taliban groups in the region mainly owe their existence to Al Qaeda. Through ideological patronage and financial support, Al Qaeda has successfully made the other militant organizations dependent upon itself; therefore, the latter are compelled to take actions according to the wishes of the former. In fact, the Afghan Taliban had to pay heavily for

hosting the top Al Qaeda leadership and refusing to hand it over to the US. Similarly, Pakistani-based militant organizations turned their guns to the state when they increasingly came under the influence of Al Qaeda as the latter wanted to punish Pakistan for its alliance with the US and NATO forces. Ironically, its head Osama bin Laden was hiding in a house, a few hundred meters from the Pakistan military training academy, Kakol, in the garrison city of Abbottabad. He was killed in a special operation by the US forces on May 2, 2011.

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

Qari Tahir Yuldashiv and Jumaboi Ahmadinovich Khojaev founded the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1998 in Kabul (Rashid, 2002). The sole purpose of the creation of the organization was to enforce the Islamic *Shariah* in Uzbekistan (Rashid, 2002). Jumaboi was killed in the 'Operation Enduring Freedom' in Afghanistan in 2001. The responsibility of leading the organization was assumed by Tahir Yuldashev after Jumaboi was killed. The IMU shifted to the Wana of South Waziristan Agency after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (Gul, 2009). The organization has close links with Al Qaeda and TTP. In fact, the presence of IMU in South Waziristan was a catalyst in the Talibanization of FATA. It was the Pakistan security forces operation against the Uzbek militants in Kalosha in 2004 that caused a rift between supporters of Yuldashev and the pro-government militants in the region (Gul, 2009). When the TTP was formed in 2007, the organization split along tribal lines with Mullah Nazir of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe supporting the government policy of evicting the foreign militants from the region while Baitullah Mahsud, on the other hand, was fighting the Pakistani security forces in support of the Uzbek militants (Gul, 2009).

Pakistani Taliban

It is important to mention here that the term Pakistani Taliban is exclusively reserved for the TTP militants. The reason for this is because they have formally declared the formation of the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan*, the only unified organization of the militants in the country, but also they have been officially termed as such. But this does not imply that the Punjabi Taliban and the non-Taliban militants in the country (to be discussed below) are non-Pakistani Taliban. They are discussed under separate headings because, in the case of non-Taliban militants, they either oppose the TTP activities or otherwise act independently for various objectives. Punjabi Taliban, on the other hand, is a contested term. Although there is no doubt that they operate in the Pakhtun region, but they do not call themselves the Punjabi Taliban. The term is used only to emphasize the fact that the prevailing uprising in the Pakhtun region is not exclusively dominated by ethnic Pakhtuns.

Emerging in 2004 as a result of the Kalosha operation by the security forces, the Pakistani Taliban have intensified their activities after the formation of the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) in 2007 (Yousufzai, 2008). Although they have their presence in the settled districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, however, they operate actively from the eight operational zones in FATA, namely: South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Kurram, Orakzai, Darra Adam Khel, Khyber, Mohmand, and Bajaur.

Punjabi Taliban

Since April 2009, the term 'Punjabi Taliban' has become popular in media discourses. In fact, it has become a controversial political issue as the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) leadership strongly objected to the use of the term by the then interior minister Rahman Malik. The former accused Rehman of fomenting trouble between provinces by using terms like "Punjabi Taliban" and "Punjabi Militants" (Fair, 2011). Punjabi Taliban are those militants who were created by the Pakistani establishment in the decades of 1980 and 1990 to concentrate on fighting the Indians in the disputed territory of Kashmir, argues Raza Rahman Khan Qazi, a Peshawar based researcher and analyst (personal communication, February 21, 2012). Pakistan considers jihad in Kashmir as a legitimate struggle for the right of self-determination and supports Kashmiri mujahideen through every possible means (Jones, 2002). Under pressure from India on 12 February 2002,

Musharraf announced a ban on some of the Kashmiri groups like *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*(LeJ) and *Jash-e-Muhammad* (Gul, 2009). It was after this U-turn by the government against them that some of the *mujahideen* groups changed their names as a disguise to reappear and resume their activities while others shifted their cadres to FATA to join the Taliban (Mir, 2009). Between March 2005 and March 2007 alone, about 2000 militants moved from Punjab to South Waziristan. Qari Hussain Mahsud, a former SSP activist who has also spent time at *Jamia Benori* Town, was instrumental in bringing the Punjabi Taliban and the Kashmiri *mujahideen* closer to the TTP (Abbas, 2009).

Punjabi Taliban have brought a ferocity to the acts of terrorism in the Pakhtun region. "Punjabi Taliban were the worst of all the militants in terms of violence as they worked under the broader umbrella of international Islamic jihadist movements", argued Dr. Razia Sultana, who was Chairperson of the department of history at the Qaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad (personal communication, December 8, 2011). Qari Hussain Mahsud, the mastermind of almost all the suicide attacks in the Pakhtun region, was a former member of the banned *Sepah-i-Sahaba* Pakistan (SSP), as discussed earlier. The Punjabi Taliban boast the fact they have extended the reach of the tribal militants from FATA to the major urban cities (Abbas, 2009).

Non-Taliban Militants

Apart from the TTP, there are other militants in the Pakhtun region who are called the non-Taliban militants. The non-Taliban militants are distinguished for their pro-government stance. As against the TTP, they do not fight the Pakistani security forces and are not involved in terrorist activities inside the country. Instead, their wholehearted energies are focused on fighting in Afghanistan against the US-NATO forces. Haqqani Network, led by Sirajuddeen Haqqani, a faction of the Afghan Taliban, is a pro-government militant organization based in North Waziristan. Mullah Nazir in South Waziristan, Hafiz Gulbahadar in North Waziristan, and Mangal Bagh Afridi in Khyber Agency were other pro-government non-Taliban commanders. In fact, Hafiz Gulbahadar, among them, was appointed as deputy to Baitullah when TTP was initially formed, but he soon parted ways with the organization as he did not want to fight the Pakistani security forces. They are discussed in the following.

Objectives of the Militants in the Pakhtun Region

It is imperative to analyze the objectives of different Taliban forces in order to know the true nature of terrorism in the Pakhtun region. Without exploring both the latent and stated objectives of the militants, it is difficult to comprehend the phenomenon of terrorism in the region.

Analyzing the objectives of the militants is not an easy task. It is a complex phenomenon. If one analyzes the Taliban operating in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, from Swat to Khyber and from Orakzai and Kurram to Waziristan, one finds different Taliban groups with different agendas. They do not have one common objective (Mushtaq Yousufzai personal communication, February 2, 2012). There are varieties of Taliban groups. Some of them are more active in Afghanistan; they have made deals with the government not to operate in Pakistan, for example, Mullah Nazir, Hafiz Gulbahadar, and the Haqqani Network. Some of them are active at both sides of the border, as the TTP. Some of them, with limited reach, are busy in certain specific areas inside Pakistan. "For example, the Mangal Bagh group in Khyber Agency do not call themselves Taliban, but they are the same people. Their operations are limited only to Khyber Agency. They are not interested in what happens in DI Khan, Qandahar or elsewhere. So there are variations among the different Taliban groups, categorizing them under a single brand is not correct", (Ijaz Khan personal communication, February 1, 2012).

However, broadly speaking, all the militant groups in the Pakhtun region wanted the imposition of Islamic *Shariah* in the region and ultimately in the country (Gul, 2009). It was evident from the demands of the *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi* (TNSM), a predecessor to the Swat chapter of the Pakistani Taliban originating in the Malakand region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. TNSM, initially a peaceful movement,

turned violent in 1994 when it came on the roads demanding immediate enforcement of the Islamic *Shariah* in the Malakand region (Mir, 2009). The Bajaur and Dir Taliban shared this objective with the Malakand Taliban. This was the time when the Afghan Taliban were at the helm of affairs in Afghanistan. Therefore, militants in the Malakand region wanted their own interpretation of the Islamic *Shariah*, the Afghan Taliban-style governance. The latter, although euphemistically called the Islamic *Shariah*, was in actual sense the dictatorship of the clerical group. This was a selection of a few extreme tenants of the Islamic *Shariah*, lacking the rationale and philosophical background of the *Shariah* Law. Some of the features of this Taliban-style *Shariah*, evident in both Afghanistan and Swat under the Taliban, were:

- i) The enforcement of justice was ensured through a mechanism of extreme punishments, i.e. execution, stoning to death, and cutting off hands for murder, adultery, and theft without having to provide for the necessary social and economic well being of the individual, based on the true Islamic system of governance.
- ii) There was no concept of human liberties based upon the concept of Basic Human Rights, enshrined in Islam as well as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There were a complete closure of all the social and cultural congregations, including a ban on music and other means of entertainment.
- iii) Women were kept marginalized in the Taliban form of *Shariah*. Not only women education was strictly prohibited, but there was also a complete ban on women's appearance in public places. This policy was also not backed up by the Islamic concept of women's rights, according to which the acquisition of knowledge is necessary for all males and females, women are to be treated humanly, and their due share in the property of the family must be ensured.

Pakistani Taliban's demand for the enforcement of *Shariah* was largely influenced by their interaction with Al Qaeda (Gul, 2009). As discussed earlier, when the Pakistani Taliban came into being, they had no intentions to fight inside Pakistan and had not declared the imposition of *Shariah* in the country as their ultimate objective. Al Qaeda played an instrumental role in the Pakistani Taliban's change of hearts towards their own country and the subsequent demand for the enforcement of *Shariah* (Rashid, 2008).

However, it must be emphasized that contrary to the Afghan Taliban, who were mostly graduated from *madrassas*, the Pakistani Taliban, except for Sufi Muhammad and Fazlullah, had no or little religious education. In most of the cases, they did not have any affiliation with *madrassas* (Gul, 2009). Therefore, having no religious training, it was a contradiction on their part asking for the imposition of *Shariah*. As opposed to Afghanistan, where the Taliban came to power by ending the infighting among different warlords and the resultant chaos in the country, no such conditions prevailed in Pakistan at the time of their emergence.

More importantly, except for the TNSM, cadres of the TTP active in different tribal agencies have even not declared the enforcement of *Shariah* as their stated objective. For example, it is ironic to note that the Taliban in the Mohmand Agency did not have any demands, except they wanted that forces should evacuate the agency and bring an end to the military operations in the region. The same was the case in North Waziristan, where militants had not demanded the imposition of *Shariah*. They wanted that the security forces must leave the area, bring an end to curfew, allow free movement to the militants, and the Agency affairs should have been handed to FC and Khasadar force (Local Militia which helps FC in maintaining law and order in the agency) (Mushtaq Yousufzai personal communication, February 2, 2012).

If the enforcement of *Shariah* was not the objective of the militants in the Pakhtun region, then what was the real motive behind their activities? Analysts believe that militants in the Pakhtun region aim, ultimately, at the acquisition of power.

These are the people who were engaged with the Afghan Taliban in one way or the other; therefore, they have a taste of power. Most of the TTP leaders have fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan; when returned, they became warlords in their own areas. Different militants groups have different agendas, but ultimately all of them want power (Mushtaq Yousufzai personal communication, February 2, 2012).

Talibanization of the Pakhtun Society

Three factors have historically helped the rise of terrorism in Pakistan generally and in the Pakhtun society specifically. These are the role of the Pakistani civil and military establishment, the realization on the part of the largely marginalized religious forces or *mullahs* that they too have a right to rule (Nasr, 2004), and the socio-political and administrative vacuum created by the colonial-era governance system in FATA (Gul, 2009). The three are interconnected as it has been the Pakistani state establishment's patronage of and appeasement towards the religious forces which brought the latter from the periphery to the mainstream of the society. In turn, both the establishment and the religious forces had a stake in deliberately keeping FATA as a virtual no go area.

It is interesting that the demand of the Taliban for the enforcement of *Shariah* in the country is in line with the basic ideology of Pakistan. The Pakistani state was created on the premise that Hindus and Muslims were two different nations and that it was impossible for the latter to live under the rule of the former after the departure of the British from the Sub-continent (Jones, 2002). Leaders of the Pakistan Movement thought that an independent country of their own would serve as a laboratory where to practice the glorious Islamic governance system based upon *Shariah* Law. The 'Directive Principles of the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has declared the enforcement of *Shariah* as the ultimate goal. The constitution further enshrines that no law that is repugnant to the true spirit of the Quran and *Sunnah* (Words and Deeds of the Prophet Muhammad SAW) would be passed by the parliament. Although Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder and first Governor-General of Pakistan, and his successors were largely secular and the dream of establishing *Shariah* in the country has not been realized till this day (Cohen, 2003), however, the state's establishment and the powerful military have not changed their mind about the future of the state. In fact, the military, which considers itself the custodian of the ideological and physical boundaries of the state, has been at the helm of affairs most of the time. The military dictators have ruled the country for 33 years, more than half of its history. The internecine fragile democratic governments have made little impact on the social and political scene of the country. Resultantly, the policy of the state has always been under the influence of the powerful military establishment. The army considers India as its biggest enemy for its anti-Pakistan policies and its illegal occupation of Kashmir. Therefore, the military-dominated Pakistan foreign policy has always been India-centric (Haqqani, 2005). Since it is difficult to confront the powerful Indian armed forces through traditional military means, the Pakistan Army reserved for itself the right to use proxies to challenge India. Hence, the Pakistani military establishment has used religion to further this policy and to camouflage its real political objectives in its relations with India. This has not been limited to only using non-state actors in the Indian-held Kashmir. All the means, including civilian, military, and educational institutions, were used to create a jaundiced view of India in the minds of the new generation. In fact, the concept of jihad against India has been internalized in the social fabric of the society through a well thought out strategy. Hence it has always been easy for them to recruit *mujahideen* from the religiously manipulated population of the country and to use them anywhere they like.

The policy of using *mujahideen* against India was carried through towards the 1970s when, for the first time, the military establishment of the country realized that by making Afghanistan its backyard, Pakistan had a better chance of challenging India (Gul, 2009). The concept of 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan is actually the product of Pakistan's India policy. Through acquiring a 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan, the Pakistan Army wanted to extend its operational capacity in any likely confrontation with its arch-rival enemy, India. This would have helped the Pakistani military in two ways. First, by making Afghanistan a backyard, the Pakistani armed forces would have been in a better position to avoid a major traditional military attack from India. Moreover, by going deep into the Afghan territory, Pakistan would have the second-strike capability in case of a nuclear strike.

Pakistan had already actively started interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan by encouraging dissident leaders to destabilize the Soviet-inclined Sardar Daud government; however, a golden opportunity to give a practical shape to this policy came in the shape of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

in December 1979 (Gul, 2009). With the help of the United States of America, Pakistan created huge jihad machinery in the Pakhtun region to recruit, train, and equip different *mujahideen* groups to fight the Red Army in Afghanistan (Abbas, 2005). This has been discussed in detail in the second chapter of this study. Here it is important to know that the successful jihad in Afghanistan generated a realization in the religious forces that they too have a right to rule. Although the military establishment was using the religious forces as a tool of foreign policy right from 1947, however, the Afghan jihad was the first major issue where the interests of both the religious forces and the military establishment converged.

In fact, historically, *mullahs* or religious figures have been marginalized, especially in the Pakhtun society. Anthropologists agree that *mullahs* have no role in the day to day secular affairs of the Pakhtun society and have never acquired leadership positions. They acquire power only in times of extraordinary crisis. As soon as the crisis situation is over, society comes to its normal secular discourse (Haroon, 2011). This is evident in the contemporary Pakhtun society, where turbulent situations for more than three decades have made the religious forces powerful. Moreover, the recognition of the *Sanad* (*Madrasa Certificate*) as equivalent to the university degree by the Zia ul Haq government in the 1980s was also a major step in this regard. For the first time in the history of the country, graduates from seminaries or *madrassas* were able to contest parliamentary elections. It is interesting to note, however, that except for the 2002 elections, the religious-political parties have never gained a considerable number of seats in either the provincial assemblies or in the national parliament. The internal situation in the country in 2002 was totally in favor of the religious parties. The United States had invaded the neighboring Muslim state of Afghanistan and the religious parties fully capitalized on the religiously and emotionally charged sentiments of the population.

Before the general election in 2002, the diverse religious parties in the country formed a grand alliance called the *Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA). In fact, the coming together of the diverse religious forces, having major ideological differences, under the banner of MMA was made possible by the hidden hand of the establishment. MMA was actually the outgrowth of the 'Afghan Defense Council', an alliance of about 40 Islamic groups formed in 2001 by the secret intelligence agencies of the country to oppose the likely US attack on Afghanistan and to show solidarity with the Afghan Taliban (Rashid, 2008).

The MMA made a successful election campaign by leading the anti-American demonstrations across the country. It emerged as the second-largest political force, after the Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q), by securing 53 seats in the national assembly. More importantly, through a landmark victory, the MMA emerged as the largest political force in the strategically important province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by winning a majority of the seats for the provincial assembly. The alliance also formed a coalition government with PML-Q in the province of Balochistan (Cohen, 2003).

In fact, the two largest political parties in the country, *Jamiatul Ulama-e-Islam* (JUI) and *Jamat-e-Islami* (JI), have always patronized the *mujahideen* groups in the country (Gul, 2009). However, it was the MMA five year rule from 2002-2007 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan that the process of Talibanization was given a spur. The religious parties not only banked upon the support of the militant groups to enlarge their constituencies but also closed their eyes to the illegal activities of the emerging Taliban groups in the Pakhtun region. The religious parties' soft corner for the militants could be gauged from the fact that when the military started operations against the latter, the former vehemently opposed the decision (Mir, 2009). Had there been no official support for the militants, it would have been difficult for the Afghan Taliban to acquire sanctuaries in the Pakhtun region. The latter had already started to shift to the tribal regions of Pakistan after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

The entry of the Afghan Taliban and the emergence of the indigenous militants in FATA have been facilitated mainly by the political and administrative system in vogue in the region. In fact, the central government in the country has never fully extended its writ to the tribal region bordering Afghanistan. In an actual sense, the constitution of Pakistan has no jurisdiction in the region as the ordinary law of the country does not apply to FATA (Gul, 2009).

This policy of keeping FATA marginalized and backward has created a socio-political and administrative vacuum in the region. This vacuum has been fully utilized by the Afghan Taliban and the local terrorists to their advantage (Gul, 2009). Furthermore, the current insurgents or Taliban have even done away with whatever little government writ in the region. By establishing a parallel administrative system, the Taliban have paralyzed the existing governance structure. The traditional *Maliki* system, an important administrative pillar, has been replaced by *mullahs* and militant leaders, making it impossible for the local administration to run the day to day affairs (Mushtaq Yousufzai, personal communication, February 2, 2012).

Thus, the current chaos and unrest leading to the Talibanization of the Pakhtun society is not a result of the normal social change but a product of the deliberate social engineering by institutions.

True Nature of the Insurgency: Concluding the Discussion

Some people believe that the current insurgency in the Pakhtun region is a Pakhtun nationalist movement. This view is mainly promoted by the Pakistani state establishment for their obvious fear of the secular Pakhtun nationalists, who they suspect to be anti-Pakistan. This has been a long-term policy of the Pakistani state establishment. Even originally, when Gulbadeen, Rabbani and Ahmad Shah were invited to Peshawar, it was against the nationalist government of Sardar Daud (Gul, 2009). It was not against the Communists, as it was not a religious issue. In reality, it was an anti-Pakhtun strategy. Another important aspect of the nature of the current terrorism in the Pakhtun society is to be found in the history and strategic location of this region. Dr. Ijaz Khan argues,

We need to understand the reasons for this are because of this region, not because of Pakhtuns. To put it in an extreme way.... if, say, Punjabis or Baloch or Sindhis or Marhathas were occupying this same region, chances are, with definitely a few cultural or other minor differences, it would have been the same case (personal communication, February 1, 2012).

In fact, it is the region, due to its close proximity with Afghanistan, which has been used by the Pakistani strategists to achieve the regional aspirations of the state. They may have capitalized on the Pakhtun culture to a certain extent, but in reality, the issue has nothing to do with the people. However, one can not deny the fact that people of the area have been used to achieve the desired objectives. Thus Pakhtuns are caught in the Delima not because of their culture but because of their region. The history of the Pakhtun region can not be separated from the history of Afghanistan because of the natural and physical commonalities of the two.

Due to the Soviet intervention in the recent past, Afghanistan and the Pakhtun region, especially FATA, have become more of ungoverned territory. Militants from all over the world were encouraged to come to Afghanistan for the war against the Soviet Union (Rashid, 2008). Human beings are not machines, so when they came, they not only developed personal relationships but also gained knowledge of the area. Some of them went back to their own countries after the war was over; some of them remained and never went back. Even a phrase became popular in those days; they used to refer to such people, even Arabs, Nigerians, and other *mujahideen*, as Afghans (Ijaz Khan personal communication, February 1, 2012). Those who went back and tried to bring Islamic changes in their own countries found it difficult because theirs were well established, governed states. So they had to get away somewhere. Afghanistan was the natural choice for two reasons. First, they knew Afghanistan, its people and its territory because they fought there and had lived there. Secondly, Afghanistan was ungoverned, so no one could stop them from coming. There were a lot of people welcoming them, but those who may have stopped them were also not to be seen. So Afghanistan very fast became a centre for militants of all kinds. Al Qaeda, which also had fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets, finding it difficult to operate from the Middle East, shifted to Afghanistan for the same reasons: being ungoverned and known to them (Rashid, 2002).

In fact, a number of Pakhtun nationalists looked towards the Taliban when they first appeared in Afghanistan in 1994. There are reports that the Taliban even recruited a certain number of Khalqis (Khalq was a faction of the Communist Party of Afghanistan) and former Afghan Army soldiers. There were even

pro Zahir Shah People who were supporting them. "It would be interesting to note that originally when the Taliban emerged in Afghanistan, Pakistan's ISI actually opposed them," says Ijaz Khan (personal communication, February 1, 2012). The Pan-Islamists like Qazi Hussain Ahmad of the JI and Gulbadin Hikmatyar called the Taliban as agents of the British secret services against Islam and Pan-Islamist movements. Some Pakhtun nationalists, pro-Shah people and other moderates thought that although the Taliban would defeat the *mujahideen* groups, however, being unable to govern the country, the moderates will take over the responsibility of governing the country and will establish a relatively moderate and peaceful government. Because they never thought that the Taliban themselves would be able to do much. However, very soon, ISI and Pakistani establishment realized that the Taliban was a strong upcoming force. Rather than alienating them, they were embraced. Along with this, the Pan-Islamists, JI and others, also changed their stance within a few months. While these changes were taking place, for different reasons, even the US had a more positive view of the Taliban. They considered the Taliban as traditional *Sunnis* and not Pan-Islamists, confined to Afghanistan and a counterweight to *Shia* Iran. In those days, they considered *Shias* more of a challenge to western interests than any extremists *Sunnis* would be. The Americans feared the Pan-Islamists *Sunnis*; however, they considered the Taliban as traditional Muslims, posing no threat to their interests (Siddique, 2011). Gradually when the Taliban gained power, the assessment of the Pakhtun nationalists, pro-Shah people and Americans proved wrong. Taliban may not have the capability, but they were able to control the state and run it for themselves, with the help of the Pan-Islamists and Pakistani state establishment. The other supporters of the Taliban were gradually sidelined. Their connection with Pan-Islamists and the Pakistani state establishment strengthened, simultaneously increasing the animosity with the west. Gradually the Pakistani establishment considered the Taliban to be their best bit in Afghanistan. Taliban were more comfortable for Pakistan than their experience with *mujahideen* under Burhanuddin Rabbani when they came into power in the early nineties. Especially Pakistan's concern was vis-à-vis India. They knew that the Taliban would deny and had denied Afghanistan to India, which the *mujahideen* under Rabbani and others had not (Siddique, 2011). Moreover, Pan-Islamists were satisfied because the Taliban gave them space.

The insurgency started in the Pakhtun region when the US-NATO forces, authorized by the UN, attacked Afghanistan, displaced the Taliban and removed them from the government in 2001 (Gul, 2009); as a result, resistance by the Taliban started. This resistance had all the components, including the original Taliban and Al Qaeda Arabs, who thought that the removal of the Taliban had denied them the safe haven which they had in Afghanistan. Pakistani establishment was not happy with the disruption of the Taliban regime because it thought that in Taliban it had a chance, the only chance to meet the minimum of their policy towards Afghanistan, its denial to India. With the US intervention, Afghanistan was now open to Indian influence as well. Pakistan had not found it very attractive (Siddique, 2011).

After the fall of the Taliban regime, most of the insurgents easily came to the different areas of Pakistan, including FATA; there was an administrative vacuum in the region, as discussed earlier. Some people interpret it that because there were fellow Pakhtuns in FATA, who gave refuge to the Taliban, but this is a wrong impression.

Therefore, the current insurgency in the Pakhtun region has all the components which the original Taliban had: the Pakistani state interest, the Arabs, and militants from all over Pakistan, including Punjab. They also go inside Afghanistan to fight with nominal allegiance to Mullah Umar, but most of them act independently. Inside Pakistan, some groups are Pakistan-specific; they fight only in Pakistan, some go inside Afghanistan for fighting, but they share one thing, Islamic extremism (Mir, 2009).

The important point is that the Taliban have never called their struggle a Pakhtun nationalist movement. Ijaz Khan rightly says,

Calling this a Pakhtun nationalist movement is totally misleading. There are Pakhtuns among them, but it becomes more visible because it is most pronounced in the Pakhtun territory due to the location, not

because of the Pakhtuns. Even the term Punjabi Taliban is misleading; the term should be Punjab-based Taliban. (personal communication, February 1, 2012)

Nationalist movements strive to protect their language and promote their culture and national identity through political means. They may also want to take the economic resources into their own hands without outside interference. At the same time, they may want autonomy within a multinational state or total independence in certain cases. Taliban in the Pakhtun region meet none of the above criteria; therefore, they cannot be considered a Pakhtun nationalist movement (Taj, 2012).

The Taliban insurgency in the Pakhtun region has to be understood more of a religious movement or Arab movement, not as a Pakhtun nationalist movement. In fact, the nature is to be found in the overall global system, the Muslim extremists and the Arab reaction to the international system, expressing itself in a particular interpretation of Islam. "So the roots are mainly in the Middle East rather" (Ijaz Khan personal communication, February 1, 2012).

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