Anti-Culture Machine: The War on Terror and its Effects on Pakhtuns and their Culture

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Abstract

This study critically evaluates the continuing campaign against terrorism. It especially discusses the counter-terrorism policies of Pakistan and the United States of America, which affects Pakhtuns and their culture. Figures show there has been a surge not only in the number but the activities of militants in the Pakhtun region after the inception of the war on terror. It is very important, therefore, to know the effects of the war on terror on Pakhtuns culture. Mostly relying on secondary data and interviews with experts in the area, the study is a qualitative analysis of the counter-insurgency campaigns and the resultant response of the local population in the area. The analysis shows two interrelated facts. The first is that ignoring cultural values in counter-insurgency campaigns can seriously undermine the efforts of combating terrorism. The second is that engaging tribes is a useful strategy in fighting terrorism. Analysis of the war on terror further reveal that disregarding facts on the ground and ignoring strongly-held cultural and religious traditions, in other words, indifference towards Pakhtunwali, has alienated the local population, thereby strengthening the militants' cause. It is recommended, therefore, that simply ignoring or deliberately targeting cultural traits can seriously undermine counter-terrorism efforts. For the counterterrorism campaign to be successful, it is necessary to gain the support of the local population. In other words, winning the hearts and minds of the people is required.

Key Words: War on Terror, Terrorism, Culture, Pakhtun Culture, Counter-Insurgency

The rationale of the study

The war on terror should be considered as an overall campaign, the purpose of which is to root out terrorism from the region. It is selective targeting of the militants or a fight against the insurgents who may be using the local population as a human shield or who may have the support of the local population in some

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cases. In fact, the Taliban do more than that. They use the local customs or cultural traits to sustain their movement. Two interrelated issues are important while analyzing the effects of the war on terror on Pakhtuns and their culture. The first is that ignoring cultural values in counter-insurgency campaigns can seriously undermine the efforts of combating terrorism. The second is that engaging tribes is a useful strategy in fighting terrorism. Analysts claim, for example, that the tribal system still works and that tribes are capable of collective action (Ross, 2010; Johnson & Mason, 2008). There are others who think differently. For example, according to Bernett Rubin (2002), new structures have emerged in Afghanistan and FATA. A centuries-old social system based upon honour-bound tribes and feudal land ownership have given way to new and more complex structures, including the Taliban, political parties, patronage networks, narcotics cartels and other business associations in the Pakhtun region especially in FATA. New realities on the ground in the Pakhtun region demand new thinking. One cannot recreate the past, according to the writer.

One can disagree with the strategy of engaging tribes in the execution of the war on terror, but one cannot deny the fact that simply ignoring or deliberately targeting cultural traits can seriously undermine counter-terrorism efforts. Therefore, for the counterterrorism campaign to be successful, it is necessary to gain the support of the local population. In other words, winning the hearts and minds of the people are required.

Rationale Behind the War on Terror

One of the main reasons for the failure of the counter-insurgency campaign is that the fundamental assumption behind the war on terror is flawed (Fierke, 2005; Jackson & Towle, 2006). In response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States of America, blinded by the desire to take revenge, acted in haste. Given the enormous emotional and psychological euphoria created by the unprecedented attack on the sole superpower of the world, such action was understandable. Not only the people of the United States of America wanted immediate retribution from the culprits, but the international community also recognized the US' right to take revenge. Al Qaeda, stationed in Afghanistan, was held responsible by the US for the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Thus Afghanistan, by protecting al Qaeda, became a symbolic enemy and a target of the US military onslaught. Although the attack on Afghanistan may have satisfied the US to a certain extent and restored some of its lost pride, however, it was certainly not the right path chosen by the United States of America.

In the first place, terming it a war is misleading. One cannot have a war on terrorism more than a war on TB, cholera or poverty. Terrorism is a faceless enemy. It is a state of mind. The US approach to the war on terror is largely influenced by its experiences in wars in the past. The framework is the same it

adopted in the wars in the 20th century where the enemy was identifiable, often personified by a leader like Hitler or Saddam, the conflict involved a specific territory in being liberated, and the issue is having clearly identifiable ending (Pillar, 2010). The same approach is replicated by Pakistan in its counter-terrorism policies.

An appropriate response to the 9/11 terrorist attack should have been to properly analyze the conditions and the circumstances that motivate terrorists to take such actions, clearly understand the goals of the terrorists, and then minutely outline implications of the various possible responses. The first is important not only to create a distance between the terrorists and the local population but also to make such an environment where it is possible to win over the latter against the former (Jackson & Towle, 2006). Militants cannot successfully operate without the covert or overt support of the local population. Taliban in the Pakhtun region depend on the local population for a safe haven. The government needs to ensure that the terrorists do not capitalize on the grievances of the people. This can only be possible when state institutions are stronger and are capable of delivering services. In the absence of strong and reliable state institutions, other non-state actors, the militants included, may take advantage of the existing vacuum and win over the support of the local population. This has actually been the case in the Pakhtun region (Hussain, 2011). Therefore, if the government is sincere to eradicate terrorism, it should make every effort to win over the support of the local people and neutralize the militants. This will help the counter-insurgency forces to mitigate the conditions which motivate the militants to arise. Second, understanding the goals of the terrorists is also very important as a tool of the counter-terrorism policy. This is closely related to the first point. The goals of the militants can also determine the response of the government. If the terrorists want to transform the existing system by changing the current constitutional, judicial, or administrative system, the government should revise its policy and look into it as to where the loopholes are.

The war on terror can only be successful if the fundamental assumption behind it is changed. Until the current framework adopted by Pakistan and the United States of America for dealing with terrorism is changed, it will not be possible to eradicate terrorism; on the contrary, it will embolden the militants. It can be done if the counter-terrorists accept the hard reality that, unlike the ordinary war, it will be a long-drawn conflict demanding, apart from precious resources, a large amount of patience and perseverance.

The US Tactics and its Implications

The counter-insurgency activities of the United States of America are largely limited to Afghanistan; however, it is necessary to analyze it because it has indirect implications on such kinds of activities in Pakistan. An important question to bear

in mind is that has the US been able to reduce terrorism or the threat of terrorism? Whether the actions of the United States of America have created "a new crop of dedicated terrorists" (Jackson & Towle, 2006, p.134)? More than a decade after embarking on Operation Enduring Freedom, insurgency in Afghanistan continues unabated. Al Qaeda leadership is as elusive as ever, and the Taliban have become the main adversary in Afghanistan (Hussain, 2008). Despite the American military superiority and the use of the enormous amount of kinetic force, the insurgency is on the rise. Further, terrorist attacks were 53 per cent up in Afghanistan, according to the estimates of the National Counterterrorism Centre (Hussain, 2008).

Soon after 9/11, four goals set by the US to be achieved in the war on terror were: capture Osama bin Laden; capture Mullah Omar, leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan; bring an end to al Qaeda in Afghanistan and elsewhere; and release prisoners of the United States of America in Afghanistan (Jackson & Towle, 2006).

Although the US was able to kill Osama bin Laden on May 2, 2011, in the garrison town of Abbottabad, Pakistan, through a secret military operation, however, it was no indication of an end to the al Qaeda activities or an end to the war on terror. Moreover, the powerful leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Mullah Muhammad Omar, is still at large, guiding the insurgency from an unknown place. Most of the eastern and south-eastern provinces of Afghanistan including, Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Nangarhar and Kunarr, are under the direct control of the Taliban (Wadhams& Cookman, 2009). The situation in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan is even more perilous where the Taliban have not only established a safe haven but also threatened the state writ in the settled areas as well (Gul, 2009). Due to these failures, the US is faced with enormous criticism at home, and the international community increasingly doubts the logic behind the prolonged occupation of Afghanistan (Jackson & Towle, 2006). The US response to this state of affairs is the deployment of more troops and the increase in the frequency of drone attacks inside Pakistan. It is reluctant to accept the hard reality that deploying more troops on the ground in Afghanistan is not a solution to the problem in that country. Unfortunately, the US has not learnt the lessons from the past military experiences in Afghanistan (Hussain, 2008).

The US failure in the war on terror can be attributed to three main factors. First, and as has been mentioned in the previous section, the coalition forces have given little time to the underlying causes that may be fueling the militancy. In fact, the US was unaware and indifferent to the problems of the complex and heterogeneous Afghan society. The new set-up, led by Hamid Karzai and brought about by the US soon after the removal of the Taliban, was dominated by Tajiks and Uzbeks (Rashid, 2008). The two ethnic groups, representing Northern Alliance, are staunch opponents of the Taliban, who are predominantly ethnic Pakhtuns. This may be one of the underlying causes of the rising militancy in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2008). Other causes may include the US foreign policy, especially its intervention in different Islamic countries around the world, the

military intervention in Afghanistan itself, its past policies regarding Afghanistan, and illiteracy, poverty and lack of economic development in Afghanistan (Jackson & Towle, 2006). Second, the coalition forces led by the US have shown disregard to the Afghan culture (Hussain, 2008). This may also be one of the underlying causes that fuel the insurgency. Both the Mughal and the British Empires utilized *Pakhtunwali* to handle affairs in Afghanistan. The British even would have anthropologists and cultural experts who would guide the military and other officials regarding the native culture (Hussain, 2008).   In the case of the US, however, apart from a few CIA officials, no one in the American military had been to Afghanistan for a decade. A few among the CIA officers could speak Dari, and no one spoke Pakhto (Rashid, 2008). This lack of knowledge of the indigenous culture and language proved instrumental in the failure of the war on terror in later years. Frequent incidents of collateral damage as a result of counter-insurgency activities strengthen the Taliban cause and hinder the coalition's efforts to win hearts and minds (Ross, 2010). Shahzad Badr rightly asks, "do you expect flowers in return of bullets? When you kill their children and women, what would you expect in return?" (cited in Latif, 2008, p. 7). The military's resort to indiscriminate force only helps the Taliban cause. (International Crisis Group, 2009). The TheUnited States of America has superior military technology and state of the art weapons, but precession is useless in the face of faulty intelligence and poor decision making on the ground (Ross, 2010).

Cognizant of its failures in the war on terror in Afghanistan, the US is now increasingly hiring cultural experts to guide the military. Special teams of experts have been established for the sole purpose to make the military and other officials aware of the cultural issues in Afghan society. Mechanisms like the US army's Human Terrain System (HTS), Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) as well as the US Marine Corps' Centre for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL) have each been examined *Pakhtunwali*. One of its main purposes is to analyze *Pakhtunwali* and see to it how it can be used in a strategy of engaging the tribes. The Human Terrain System (HTS) places military anthropologists in deployed brigades. This helps update the military on the ground about the cultural specificities. Analysts, however, believe that practically the strategy is not working (Ross, 2010). This is true because incidents of collateral damage are on the rise, and the ranks of the Taliban are swelling with the passage of time, as discussed earlier. Thus the US is in serious need of changing its existing strategy regarding the war on terror in Afghanistan. In fact, the current policy has alienated the local population.

Pakistan's Tactics and its Effects

The US policy of 'you are either with us or against us' in the wake of 9/11 hardly left any room for Pakistani policymakers to manoeuvre. Pakistan was compelled

to take a U-turn on its long-term Afghan policy. Pakistan's entire Afghan and India policy, for that matter, was largely dependent on a friendly regime in the shape of the Taliban. By joining the war on terror, Pakistan had to swallow the bitter pill of taking on the force it had itself created. However, four other reasons advanced by the government in power for joining the war on terror were,

i)   to strengthen the efforts at economic revival;
ii) to protect Pakistan's nuclear weapons program;
iii) to safeguard Pakistan's interests in relation to the Kashmir issue; and
iv) to avoid being itself a target of the war on terror (Tellis, 2008)

Pakistan supports the US in the war on terror by giving the US and its military the facilities and access for the prosecution of 'Operation Enduring Freedom' in Afghanistan. It conducts internal security operations (often in collaboration with the US law enforcement agencies) to interdict terrorist financing and apprehend and render terrorist targets for prosecution abroad. Most importantly, Pakistan under Operation Al Mizan deployed battalions from the army's IX corps and Special Services Group (SSG) to the tribal areas for the first time in the history of the country. So far, more than 700 al Qaeda and other operatives have been captured and handed over to the United States of America by the Pakistani security forces (Tellis, 2008).

At the time of joining the war on terror in 2001, Pakistan was not aware that with the passage of time, it would have to fight a full-fledged insurgency in the shape of the Taliban at home. From 2003, when the Pakistan military first arrived in FATA, to 2007, the insurgency in the country became a major force to be reckoned with (Rashid, 2008; Gul, 2009). This can largely be attributed to three factors: firstly, the US occupation of Afghanistan and the subsequent relocation of some al Qaeda and Taliban affiliates to safe havens in the tribal region of Pakistan. Secondly, Pakistani decision to join the US-led war on terror, and finally, Pakistan's ambivalent policy towards the militants, especially the peace deals which gave time to the latter to consolidate their position and bring more areas under their control.

Pakistani performance in the fight against terrorism has not been uniform. While the security forces have successfully cleared Swat and the entire Malakand Division from the militants, they have been unable to replicate that situation in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) (See the third chapter of this study). Militancy in the shape of Talibanization is on the rise, and the security forces are either unable or unwilling to seriously handle the situation. In fact, the activities of the security forces have further deteriorated the situation not only in FATA but in the whole of the Pakhtun region (Kerr, 2010). Pakistani military's awareness of local traditions and values is hardly better than that of the US security forces. In fact, the arrival of the Pakistan army to FATA itself has resulted in social

disruption that has undermined its counter-terrorism effectiveness (Tellis, 2008). The Pakistani military's indifference to the needs of the civilians, especially its resort to indiscriminate force, economic blockades of the entire tribes and some of the appeasement deals with the militants in the tribal region, is only helping the Taliban cause (International Crisis Group, 2009). Its reliance on brute force, resulting in frequent incidents of collateral damage, its disregard for a local mechanism like *jirgah*, and its indifference towards the root causes that may be fueling the insurgency, the Pakistani security forces are only alienating the local population and strengthening the militant's cause (Kerr, 2010).

Another important flaw in the Pakistani approach to the war on terror, as identified by analysts, is its selective approach in dealing with different militant groups. For example, on the one hand, it seriously dealt with al Qaeda, helped the US in disrupting its command structure and captured or killed hundreds of its members. Its approach to the indigenous Taliban has been questionable, as Taliban activity has increased, especially in FATA, rather than decreased after the military operations against the militants. Its approach towards the different indigenous *mujahideen* groups has also not been uniform. While, under pressure from the United States and India in 2002, Pakistan seriously dealt with and banned the sectarian organizations like the *Sepah-e-SahabaPakistan* (SSP) and its offshoot, *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, along with the *Shia Tehrik-e-Jafaria* and its offshoot *Sepah-e-Muhammad*, it's dealing with the Punjab and Kashmir based *mujahideen* groups like *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, *Jaish-e-Muhammad*, and *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen* has not been severe. Resultantly, cadres of these groups simply relocated to the tribal areas of Pakistan and joined the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) (Tellis, 2008). As explained in the third chapter, the ferocity in the activities of the Pakistani Taliban can be attributed to their close contact with the Kashmiri *mujahideen* groups. In fact, the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan's* opposition towards the Pakistani security forces can also be explained due to their coming in contact with the Punjab-based *mujahideen* groups.

Peace Deals as a Tool of Counter-Insurgency

"In response to an escalating insurgency, the Pakistani government COIN (Counter-insurgency) policy is inconsistent; ineffective military operations are followed by negotiations, which are usually succeeded by a cease-fire" (Zaidi, 2009, p. 264). The militants have almost always violated the intermittent ceasefires and used the intervening period to strengthen their positions. The Pakistani military has signed many peace deals with militants, especially in FATA. Almost all peace deals fail to achieve the desired results due to one reason or the other. This usually leads to another military offensive against the militants, which again is followed by a peace deal (Zaidi, 2009).

It started from Wana, South Waziristan Agency, with the signing of the Shakai

agreement with Commander Nek Muhammad Wazir in 2004. Through this agreement, the militants were able to spread to Shakai, which brought them closer to the Mahsud dominated area of South Waziristan. From there, it was easy for the militants to come to the adjacent North Waziristan (Gul Marjan Wazir, personal communication, October 20, 2012). Although Commander Nek Muhammad Wazir was killed by a US missile in June 2004 in the same year, the government carried out a blockade of the entire Mahsud tribe of South Waziristan under the obligation of "collective responsibility". Hostilities between the two parties led to the signing of another agreement, the Sararogha agreement of 2005 (Zaidi, 2009). Under the agreement, the military vacated the area and undertook to refrain from any future military operation in the region. The deal was successful in bringing peace to the South Waziristan Agency for a while, but the militants were able to utilize the time to strengthen their hold on North Waziristan. Again in a bid to control the spread of militancy in North Waziristan, a similar peace deal was signed with Baitullah Mahsud in 2006 (Zaidi, 2009). The purpose of this deal was to secure army convoys and checkpoints from the militants' attacks. However, the deal was soon violated by the militants as attacks on the coalition forces increased inside Afghanistan along the border of Waziristan. This again compelled the security forces to resume talks with Baitullah Mahsud. In line with the state policy of appeasement towards the militants, a similar agreement was signed with Maulvi Faqir Muhammad of *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi* (TNSM) in Bajur (Zaidi, 2009). Moreover, in 2008 and 2009, a number of agreements were signed with Sufi Muhammad and Maulvi Fazlullah, head of the Swat chapter of the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan*, but to no avail (Mir, 2009). As mentioned earlier, every peace deal has been followed by a military offensive. Again the military offensive has been followed by another round of talks with the militants. The talks normally have led to yet another peace agreement (Zaidi, 2009).

Deals were signed with the militants when they were not fully defeated and the area under their control was not regained. These peace deals have done several things; firstly, they conferred legitimacy on the militants and recognized them as a legitimate party. Secondly, it gave them time to reorganize and bring more areas under their control because people's confidence in the Taliban would increase with every peace deal. Thirdly, because of these peace deals, people would join the ranks of the Taliban out of fear as they knew that the government was unable to protect them from the fury of the Taliban if they opposed them (Gul Marjan Wazir, personal communication, October 20, 2012). Wazir rightly said that a proper approach to these deals should have been a prior demand from the militants to surrender weapons. "What is the utility of this kind of deals when it is known from the beginning that they would be followed by a military operation" asks Wazir (personal communication, October 20, 2012). The United States of America too is strongly critical of the Pakistani approach of signing peace agreements with the militants. The US rightly anticipates that this serves as a beacon for the militants

to regroup and enable them to renew the insurgency and terrorist attacks (Zaidi, 2009).

Cultural Distortion

It is argued that the arrival of the Pakistan army itself to FATA has resulted in social disruption that has undermined its counter-terrorism effectiveness (Tellis, 2008). Indiscriminate shelling and firing by the security forces, collateral damage in the shape of the killing and wounding of a large number of innocent unarmed civilians, burning of homes and crops, the destruction of social institutions (bomb blasts in *jirgas*, mosques and *hujras*), and the killing of tribal elders as a result of the war on terror, have brought cultural distortion leading to a vacuum. This vacuum, in turn, could be filled by radical forces (Kerr, 2010).

Unfortunately, state institutions in the Pakhtun region are weak to the point of non-existent. This holds true not only for FATA but also for the settled regions of the Pakhtun land. The administrative system in vogue in FATA only perpetuates the prevailing marginalization of the pople of the region. State writ in the region is limited as political parties are non-functional, and the superior judiciary of the country has no jurisdiction in the region. As a result, there is a strong reliance on social and cultural institutions such as *Hujra* and *Jirgah*. These institutions have been completely destroyed as a result of the chaos in the Pakhtun region. In turn, this has brought total disorder to the Pakhtuns. The destruction of the social structure has brought enormous changes in the concept of *Pakhtunwali* (Kerr, 2010). The latter guides the behavior of the people in the Pakhtun society. When the concept of *Pakhtunwali* was transformed, it brought cultural distortion. Culture is so important that even the militants could use the Pakhtun cultural traits. Although the erosion of these traditional institutions started in the 1980s when the traditional *mullahs* increasingly gained power (see second chapter); however, the US-led war on terror accelerated this process. The resultant death and destruction in the shape of terrorism and the war on terror have affected the Pakhtun culture in many ways.

For example, there has been an unprecedented displacement as a result of the war on terror. Cultural anthropology tells us that geography is very important to a culture, as rightly argued by Zafar Khan of the Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar, who is himself a tribal. Changes in geographic conditions bring changes in culture as well. Where there has been migration, there have been corresponding changes in culture. Concepts of *Pakhtunwali,* such as honor, largely transforms as a result of displacement. "*Khalaq ba a wai*" (what would the people say) is a mechanism of social control in the Pakhtun society. This concept of *Pakhtunwali*, according to which people restrain to do a certain act due to the fear of the opinion of the community, is central to *Pakhtunwali*. However, this holds no meaning as a result of displacement where people come to live in different

settings, in public buildings, tents, or among relatives (personal communication, July 16, 2012).

History tells us that people in tents in the Pakhtun region have been manipulated and used for different political objectives. As a result, they have been easy targets of social engineering. One of the most important examples of this is that *madrassa* in the Pakhtun region were nourished when they were in camps (Hussain, 2008). *Salfist* ideology and the concept of global jihad penetrated the Pakhtun society when the Pakhtuns were displaced in large numbers (Marwat, 2005). Even the use of children in armed conflicts is a result of this cultural distortion. This can be traced to the 1980s in the Soviet-Afghan war but is noticible in the present Pakhtun society as well.

Another important cultural change in the Pakhtun society is the transformation of the *jirgah*. In fact, *jirga* has been taken over by the inexperienced younger generation as a result of the killing of large numbers of tribal *maliks* and elders. Hundreds of tribal elders have been killed in the continuing death and destruction in the Pakhtun region. Those *maliks* and tribal elders were well versed in classic Pakhtun traditions. *Jirga,* with them, therefore, was in safe hands(Kerr, 2010). Apart from the changes in its leadership, the war on terror has affected the *jirga* in other ways too. In the prevailing circumstances in the region, the institution, organization, and especially the process of *jirga* has become a risky affair. It has been targeted by the militants on many occasions. This has been consciously done not only to instil fear in the people to stop them from taking sides with the government but to disrupt the government efforts for reconciliation.

Moreover, the ongoing war on terror has badly affected the institution of the traditional tribal *Lashkar* (a group of armed tribal volunteers instituted for specific purposes e.g. implementation of the decisions of *jirga*). The government has been consistent in organizing tribal *lashkars* not only to ward off the spread of the militants but also to use them as a second line of defence. However, this policy of the state, using civilians in combat, has not been effective. In fact, contrary to the utility of tribal *lashkars* in the traditional Pakhtun culture, this strategy has failed (Muzzammil Khan, personal communication, March 13, 2012). These tribal *lashkars* have been given the names of peace committees by the government. However, through a conscious policy of target killings most of the leadership of these *lashkars* have been eliminated. This has instilled a fear in the mind of the people who are increasingly reluctant to take part in these committees. Apart from a few exceptions most of these so called peace committees have failed to deliver. Only the *lashkar* formed by the Salarzai tribe in Bajaur Agency was able, to a certain extent, to keep the militants at bay. In the rest of the tribal region peace committees have been unable to check the spread of the militants. This has greatly damaged the image of the traditional institution of tribal *lashkar* which has been highly valued by the Pakhtuns for hundred of years. Traditional tribal *lashkar* is

actually a part of the larger cultural institution, the concept of communal life in the Pakhtun society.

Communal life is characterized by *Ashar* (collective action) and *Jirga*. As identified by Dr. Khadim Hussain, "the concept of communal life can be used for the containment and eradication of militancy as well as a tool of counter-terrorism" (personal communication, July 9, 2012). Dr. Khadim Hussain, who is a linguist, political analyst, and an expert on the Pakhtun culture further, says,

That is why the militants have targeted *jirga,* and they have destroyed the institution of *hujra*. In fact, this communal life has got the capacity to throw radicalization out of this whole region; its defence mechanism is so strong. There is an element of pluralism in the concept of communal life. But this defence mechanism of the communal life needs to be institutionalized. (personal communication, July 9, 2012)

Some people argue that one cannot recreate the past. They would say that the destruction and the transformation of the traditional setup in the Pakhtun region, especially in FATA, does not mean that one should remain hostage to the past. This line of thinking further argues that, after all, the current turmoil on the Pakhtun land is partly a product of the prevailing cultural, political and administrative system in the region. It was actually the lacunas in the system and the vacuum created by the legal and administrative setup that was filled by the militants. Therefore, the transformation of this system should be welcomed. Although it is true that the traditional system has been disrupted, but there is no alternative system as well. In the absence of a viable alternative system, society will be vulnerable to such forces as radicalization. No society can function normally in chaos and disorganization (Kerr, 2010).

Militants in the Pakhtun region do not have an agenda. Their objectives are not clear, and their demands are, at the most, obscure (see the third chapter). In short, the Taliban do not have an alternative political, economic, and administrative system. In the same way, the current anti-Taliban campaign in the Pakhtun region is not succeeding in achieving the desired objectives. It seems the war on terror is heading in the wrong direction. At the same time, it seems a long and drawn out conflict, and there is no end in sight in the near future. Therefore, people do not have optimism regarding the future of the region. Rather, one can safely say that the counter-terrorism campaign has further alienated the people. The misdirected and ambivalent policies of the security forces have strengthened the militant cause. Thus the war on terror may be achieving the opposite of what it was meant to achieve. People may not oppose the Taliban due to fear. But they may actively join the militants due to the wrong and misdirected policies of the security forces. This is a dangerous scenario where people may not share the ideology of the Taliban, but they may support their cause due to personal reasons.

Recourse to *Badal*

Counter-insurgency policies have compelled many in the Pakhtun region to join the Taliban for the sole purpose of taking revenge. Pakhtuns live in a contact society where extended relationships take precedent over the individual. The honor of one person affects the honor of the whole family or entire tribe in some cases. Thus it becomes obligatory for a person to restore the honor of the affected family or tribe (Hussain, 2008). The loss of life is considered as the biggest violation of honor, even if it is accidental, and demands immediate retribution or reconciliation, for example, through a *jirga* (Hussain, 2008). Without a process of reconciliation from both sides, the only option left with the affected person or persons is to take revenge.

The approach of the counter-terrorists in the Pakhtun region is not different from the foreign invading armies in the past. There is a heavy reliance on the aerial bombardment, including drone strikes in the FATA region. Keeping in view the militants' strategy of using humans as a shield and their tactic of luring the security forces to populated areas, and heavy reliance on air force by the security forces is resulting in an enormous amount of civilian casualties. For example, in March 2007, at least 21 civilians were killed in a US airstrike in the Southern province of Helmand in Afghanistan. Similarly, in April that year, in one of the biggest incidents of collateral damage, at least 57 civilians were killed at Shindand in Western Afghanistan (Hussain, 2008). That is why eleven years after the US invasion, there are no signs of an end to the Talibanization in Afghanistan. The same is the case in the Pakhtun region in Pakistan. Frequent US drone strikes, aerial bombardment, and ruthless activities by the ground forces have undermined the objectives of the counter-terrorism campaign and strengthened the militants' cause. For example, in 2006, when a US drone strike hit a *madrassa* in the Chengai area of Bajaur Agency, Maulvi Faqir Muhammad of the TNSM stood at the sight of the attack and pledged to take *Badal* (Revenge) from the perpetrators of the attack (Hameed Gul, personal communication, December 8, 2010). Most importantly, the creation of the *Tehrik-e-Taliban* Pakistan in December 2007 was itself a reaction to the enormous collateral damage in the Lal Masjid operation that year.

Apart from collateral damage in terms of human loss, other cultural violations by the security forces, for example, displacement from one home, may also compel the people to invoke *Badal*. The concept of honor demands that a Pakhtun does not leave his home, no matter what are the circumstances. One who leaves his home is called *Beghairata* (without honor). In fact, displacement from one home is one of the biggest sentences given to a wrongdoer in the Pakhtun society. Therefore, the concept of revenge or *Badal* may have been invoked by many in the contemporary Pakhtun society as demanded by the dictates of *Pakhtunwali*. It should not be

ignored; therefore, that exodus in mass in the Pakhtun region is not helping the cause of counter-terrorism.

This is certainly a dangerous scenario. The policies and strategies of the war on terror need to be redirected. Counter-terrorism strategies should be responsive to the aspiration of the local population.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The counter-insurgency policies are not helping the cause of rooting out terrorism from the region. In fact, it has done the opposite. The Pakistani security forces' policy of dealing with the rising threat of militancy is ambivalent. For example, military operations have been carried out against the militants in some places, but peace deals have been signed with them in other places. Peace deals have only given leverage to the terrorists as they not only confer legitimacy upon them but also give them time to consolidate their position and expand their operational area. It is not surprising, therefore, that the number of active militants had increased at a time when the Pakistan army had the largest military deployment in the history of the region. Indiscriminate shelling and bombardment of the civilian areas and blockading of the entire tribes in some cases have only strengthened the militants' cause. Moreover, US drone strikes in FATA, resulting in an enormous amount of collateral damage, have also alienated the local population from the security forces. In fact, the mechanism of the ongoing war on terror, instead of rooting out the scourge of terrorism from the region, has further radicalized the Pakhtun society.

Militancy is a state of mind, and it has penetrated deep into the social fabric of the Pakhtun society. Unless and until serious attention is given to this fact, one cannot completely root out terrorism from the country generally and from the Pakhtun region specifically. Reliance only on the use of military force is not the right answer to the problem of militancy. A more balanced approach would be to combine both the strategies, military option in the short term and dealing with the social aspect of militancy as the long term policy. Focusing on the use of force only would mean fighting the symptoms of terrorism and not the root causes. Cultural sensitivities on the ground must be kept in mind not only to hinder the support base of the militants but to win over the hearts and mind of the local population.

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