

War on Terror and Pak-Afghan Borderland



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Abstract: *The US-led war on terror against Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda network has brought gigantic socio-political and economic impacts on the overall population of Pashtuns of FATA and KP. The US drone strikes largely targeted the Pashtuns population in the tribal belt of Pakistan while the Pakistani security forces particularly conducted various operations in the Pashtuns areas, being a partner /ally of the get praise. In the war, thousands of innocent civilians, including children and women of the Pashtuns population, have been killed, injured and millions remained displaced. Infrastructure, including roads, public and private buildings, bridges, educational institutions, tourism, etc, in the Pashtuns' land, has been destroyed. This paper is an attempt to analyze the so-called war on terror and how it turned against the Pashtuns of FATA and KP. The suffering of the Pashtuns population as targeted by the US drone strikes, Pakistan security forces, and terrorists attacks have been examined in this paper.*

Key Words: War on Terror, Pak-Afghan Borderland, Osama bin Laden,

Introduction

The 19 men, who were responsible for terrorist's attacks inside the US on 9/11, were Arabs, non-of-them was a Pashtun, nor anyone belonged to Afghanistan or Pakistan, but as a result of the tragic events of September 2001, the US invaded Afghanistan, and it targeted the Pashtun population. Though the questions of 9/11 what happens and how happens remained a great challenge for the Bush administration and remained confused about how to respond to 9/11. Subsequently, the Bush administration identified that those 19 terrorists were the members of the al-Qaeda network, operating from Afghanistan ([Rabbi, 2012, 72](#)) and declared a war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, with the objectives of the crackdown of al-Qaeda, eradication of terrorism from Afghan soil, and prevention of other states supporting terrorism ([Woodward, 2002, 103](#)). The US led war against terrorism in Afghanistan resulted in the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as well as the infiltration of al-Qaeda/terrorists into the Pak-Afghan border region, particularly to the areas

of Pashtun, FATA (Federally Administrated Tribal Areas), and KP (Khyber Pukhtunkhwa).

The US declared the Pashtun areas bordering Afghanistan as safe-haven, and the most dangerous place on earth, etc. ([Nawaz, 2009](#)) and conducted hundreds of drone strikes while pressured Pakistan for military actions. The US-led war against terrorism was launched for the purpose of abolishing the Al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan. Pakistan was pressured by the US and subsequently became an ally in the so-called war on terror. The war against terrorism soon shifted from its prime objectives of eliminating al-Qaeda and turned a war against Pashtoon. The US drone strikes, Pakistan's military operations in Pashtoon areas of FATA and KP not only resulted in the killing of many terrorists but also killed thousands of Pashtoon civilian. The suicide attacks by al-Qaeda /Taliban inside Pashtoon areas also resulted in the massacre of the Pashtun population. So the three sides war; from the US side, Pakistani side, and terrorist side, has deep-rooted implications for the Pashtoon of Pakistan,

and thus the war on terror is labeled as a war against Pashtun. In this article, an attempt has been made to analyze the implications of the war on terror on the Pashtun population of Pakistan of FATA and KP.

The Regions of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

FATA is located in the north-west of Pakistan between KP, Baluchistan, and the Pak-Afghan border. Politically FATA is divided into seven Agencies; Khyber, Bajaur, Mohmand, Orakzai, North and South Waziristan, and six Frontier Regions (FR); Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, and DI.Khan. Spread over more than dozen of tribes and hundreds of sub-tribes and clans, FATA has an area of 27,220 sq km. ([Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2010, 25-26](#)). It has a population of 4.2 million (estimated in 2010-11 and 5.1 in 2017), the majority are Pakhtun, and with an illiteracy ratio of 7.8([Census, 2017](#)). It is the most underdeveloped region in Pakistan with sixty percent (60%) of its people living below poverty level. FATA has had a unique political and administrative since British times. They ruled this region through Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) of 1901 and controlled it through political Agents and tribal elders, leaving the people with their traditions and internal independence. Pakistan has inherited this system and, with less or more development continues to be governed primarily through the same FCR of 1901. However, this area is included among the territories of Pakistan under Article 1 of the 1973 Constitution ([Constitution 1973, 2010, 5](#)). but it retains the same semi-autonomous status while the international security and judicial issues are managed by the tribes on their own. It has representation in the National Parliament, but still, it remains outside the parliamentary process and has no power over decisions taken for FATA.

Pakistan has not fully integrated this region into the country. There is a ban on political parties, and it has not been accorded the same priority in terms of the development process being undertaken in other parts of the country and remained neglected. Thus this region is one of the underdeveloped and poorest regions of the country ([Haqq, N. U. 2008](#)). Historically, this area was once the "battleground on which the 'Great Game' of imperial domination was played out in the 19th century". It served as a "bulwark against Russian expansionism" ([Constitution 1973, 2010, 145](#)) during the cold war, and now in the war

on terror, a so-called "safe haven" for Taliban and al-Qaeda. Lack of education, unemployment, internal tribal conflicts, and the war on terror increased militancy and violence, thus turning this region into one of the "the most dangerous place" on earth ([Nawaz, 2009, iv](#)).

Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, a province located in the northwest of Pakistan between Afghanistan, FATA, Baluchistan, Punjab, Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Kashmir. It covers an area of 74,521 sq. km, a population of 23.7 million ([Pakistan Economic Survey 2010-11, 6](#)), while its majority population (79.9%) is Pashtuns and constitutes 13.4% of the total population of Pakistan, according to 1898 Census. The illiteracy ratio is 49.1%, and the rate of unemployment is more than the rest of Pakistan ([Census 1998](#)). Politically KP differs from other provinces of Pakistan. It is divided into 25 districts, most of which comprise the settled areas, as well as Provincial Administered Tribal Areas (PATA), consists of former princely states, tribal areas, and tribal territories within the district, such as the districts of Swat, Buner, Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Chitral, Shangla, Kala Dhaka and Malakand Agency, and has a population of 831,000 ([Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2010, 24](#)).

The Constitution of Pakistan applies fully to KP, and like other provinces of Pakistan, the provincial government governed KP, and political parties are active and participate in elections. But unlike, the settled districts of KP, PATA has a distinct nature. Article 246 (b) of the constitution of Pakistan constitutes PATA ([Constitution 1973, 2010, 145](#)). It "falls under the responsibility of the KP Chief Minister and is represented in the provincial legislature. The KP Governor can change or extend laws to PATA only with the President's approval." It is subject to the jurisdiction of Pakistan's regular court system, but Pakistan's Criminal Procedure Code is not applicable to PATA, nor can any Act of the provincial assembly be applied to PAT ([Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2010, 29-30](#)). The poverty level in KP is estimated as 17% in 2007/8, while the unemployment rate is higher than the rest of Pakistan ([Central Intelligence Agency, 2008](#)).

Apart from KP, the people of FATA are traditionally orthodox and strictly adhere to their customs and traditions of Pukhtunwali; codes of honour, courage, revenge, hospitality, and asylum, etc. The inhabitants of Pashtun in Pakistan and Afghanistan had maintained freedom of cross border

movement for centuries. This peculiar set-up of the areas of Pashtun across the Pak-Afghan border has been exploited not only by the Al-Qaeda and Taliban to take refuge/shelter but also by the United States and "the Pakistani state in creating *Jihadi* groups", against the Red Army in the 1980s (Ahmad, 2010, 104-105). The al-Qaeda and Taliban taking refuge in the FATA after 2001 were perceived by the tribal leaders and Pashtun nationalists with huge fear that "the monster of war was revisiting them." The Taliban rigid and extreme interpretation of Islam was not in harmony with the culture of Pashtun. So progressive and nationalist Pashtuns stood against al-Qaeda and Taliban and suffered a lot before the Pakistani security forces took control of tribal belt (Ashraf, 2011).

War against Terrorism and the Suffering of Pashtuns Population

Since the tragic events of 9/11, the US had no diplomatic connection with the government of the Taliban in Afghanistan, so the demand for the handover of Osama to the US was made by Washington through the Islamabad channel. The government of the Taliban repeatedly pleaded for proof of Osama's involvement in the 9/11 attacks, insisted on the Osama trial in Kabul according to in accordance with Afghanistan laws, and also considered the demand of the US against their tradition of asylum. Even the government of President Bush failed to provide any proof and consistently pressured the Taliban regime for the extradition of Osama from Afghanistan. After the refusal of the Taliban to hand over Osama to the US, the Bush administration launches an invasion of Afghanistan (Rabbi, 2012, 75). After the fall of the Taliban regime, the US and NATO operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban continued in Afghanistan.

The al-Qaeda and Taliban affiliates had no option but to take refuge in the Pak-Afghan border region, the areas of Pashtun. Thus in the war against terrorism, the area of FATA was considered by the US as a sanctuary for al-Qaeda terrorists ousted from Afghanistan. For several times Pakistan was accused by the US of terrorists' attacks on US/NATO forces in Afghanistan. Under momentous US pressure, Pakistan was compelled to take serious actions against terrorists/militants insides FATA and KP. The US drone strikes and Pakistan's security forces operations in FATA and KP resulted in the rising of insurgencies

in Pakistan and resulted in the hectic disruption of the socio-political and economic life of Pashtun.

In different targeting incidents, the al-Qaeda and Taliban killed those Pashtun tribal leaders' opponents to Taliban ideology. When the war on terror became a war of survival of Pakistan itself in 2007, it launched effective military operations in the Pashtun-dominated areas of FATA and KP. The war from 2001 to 2001 resulted in the total death of 38000 civilians and 3000 security personals; around 70% were Pashtun, and thus the "state's strategy to employ violence for the purpose of ending violence resulted in more violence." However, one thing needs to be clear that the "religious extremism was not the exclusive trait of Pashtun culture-as it was believed earlier in the rest of Pakistan" (Ashraf, 2011).

Due to its religious inclination, cultural restraints, social structure, and geographical proximity with Afghanistan, the Pashtun population of FATA and KP have been targeted in the so-called war on terror. The war against terrorism has negative socio-political and economic repercussions for Pakistan in general and for the Pashtun population in particular and thus has created hatred among the Pashtun. A report of the foreign policy magazine noted that "Pakistan's war against Taliban and al-Qaeda in the northwest is taking a tremendous toll on the local population. The military's killing of civilians, collective punishment of locals, and continued detention of thousands have produced an unprecedented level of animosity towards the federal government and security forces" (Farooq, U. 2013).

Pakistan became the ally of the US in the war against terrorism and was promised by the Washington of economic and military aid. For almost 16 years since the US-led coalition and invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan's security forces conducted various operations in FATA, Swat, and other parts of KP, while the US drone trikes continuously targeted these areas with the prime objectives of targeting al-Qaeda and Taliban. While taking revenge, in reverse, the al-Qaeda and Taliban speeded terror activities, particularly inside the Pashtun population in particular, and thus suicide bombing and targeting innocent people remained daily routine for many years. As a result of these military operations, US drone strikes, and terrorist suicide attacks, the Pashtun people faced a terrible situation. The three sides' war inside Pashtun land not only resulted in the killing of hundreds of civilians, thousands of injuries, destruction of infrastructure but

also created mass resentment. Many Pashtun considered the war against terrorism war against Pashtun.

Though Pakistan's security forces operations were backed by public support, and even the educated and moderate Pashtun public/politician appraised these operations resulted in the eradication of the menace of terrorism, and the sacrifices of Pakistan's army, but still these operations "has undermined the foundations of the social, political and economic structure of KP, the Pashtun areas in particular". The US drone strikes and Pakistan's security forces operations gave rise to hatred and popular sentiment in Pashtun against "the army and the Musharraf regime" (Ahmad, 2010, 106).

A survey of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies outlined that in Pakistan, 18% of Madrassas (religious seminary) have been affiliated with Jihadi/sectarian groups, about 80% of the students of these seminars are against Pakistan's cooperation with the US in the war on terror, and its military operations in FATA, while 20 percent considered the insurgency in Pakistan as a reaction to Pakistan' participation with the US-led

war on terror (Rana, 2009).

The intervention of Pakistan's security forces in the tribal areas is being "perceived by tribal leaders as a threat to their authority and tribal values." In comparison, military operations in FATA and KP and US drone strikes in Pashtun land have been viewed as "genocide against Pashtun of tribal areas and as threat to their ethnic and Islamic identity" (Ahmad, 2010, 107).

The Bureau of Investigative of Journalism noted there was total of 428 US drone strikes in FATA and KP, resulting in the killing of 4020 people, including 969 civilians and 207 children, while more than 1740 people injured (*The Bureau of Investigative of Journalism*). The South Asian Terrorism Portal reported that from 2005 to 2017, there were a total of 326 drone strikes in Pakistan, which killed 2822 people while injured more than 350. Almost all these attacks were conducted in the Pashtun areas (*The South Asian Terrorism Portal*). The total number of death and percentage of civilians killed in US drone strikes in the Pashtun belt of Pakistan, according to various sources, are shown in the table.

Table 1. The total death of Pakistani Pashtuns in drone strike (2004 to 2015)

Sources	Civilian Killed	Militants Killed	% Civilians Killed
The Bureau of Investigative of Journalism	953	3837	24.8
Long War Journal	156	2883	5.4
The New America Foundation	286	3002	9.5
Pakistan Body Count	1409	1944	72.5

The drone strikes were also found by Pashtun civilian troublemaking for their living, as these strikes resulted in the destruction of infrastructure and also contributed to various problems of displacement, disease, and malnutrition. According to a report of the Heinrich Boel Foundation, the drone strikes have been carried out "with the government consent in FATA. However, the terms and conditions of the agreement "is a top national secret." Due to these drone strikes, Pashtun of FATA live under consistent fear of death. A displaced person of North Waziristan was noted to say, "Our children cannot move out in the presence of 15 to 20 drones scanning us all the day long" (Ashraf, 2011).

Apart from drone strikes, "the Pakistani Security Forces have also killed civilians with mortars, direct fire, and bombs as they target militants and fight to support a precarious government." These military operations also resulted in the displacement of the

civilian population. Using various methods of suicide, ambushes, and assassination, the al-Qaeda, Taliban, other militant organizations killed thousands of Pashtun FATA and KP. Various experts have agreed that the targeting of the civilian population by militants was the direct result of Pakistan's military operations. Even the Taliban claimed that the massacre of 132 children in Army Public School at Peshawar "was revenge for Pakistani military operations in Waziristan, Operations Zarb-e-Azb, and for the US drone strikes" (Crawford, 2015, 10-12).

The militants deliberately attacked Pashtun civilians in particular and the rest of the Pakistani population in general. They often used suicide bombing methods, which was rare in Pashtun society. In 2014, there were 325 terrorist attacks in KP that killed 542 and injured 829 people. In FATA, the total numbers of terrorist attacks were 234, killed 293, and injured 389 people. While in 2015, there were 125

terrorist attacks in KP that killed 206 and injured 268. In FATA, the total numbers of terrorist attacks were 149, killed 268, and injured 370. For detail of terrorist attacks in KP and FATA, see the following Table.

Table 2. Terrorist attacks and casualties in KP and FATA (2008-2016)

Years	Regions	Terrorist attacks	Killed	Injured
2016	KP	127	189	355
	FATA	99	163	221
2015	KP	125	206	268
	FATA	149	268	370
2014	KP	325	542	829
	FATA	234	293	289
2013	KP	499	704	1745
	FATA	293	425	932
2012	KP	456	401	1081
	FATA	388	631	1095
2011	KP	512	820	1684
	FATA	675	612	1190
2010	KP	459	836	1832
	FATA	720	904	1433
2009	KP	1137	1439	3616
	FATA	644	1046	559
2008	KP	1009	982	1735
	FATA	385	619	892
Total		8236	11080	20126

(Data have been calculated from various Pakistan Security Reports of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS), from the years 2008 to 2016. For detail see <http://pakpips.com/>)

Whatever it was drone strikes, military operations, and terrorist activities, or clashes between security forces and militants, the Pashtun populations suffered the most. The fatalities in various military operations; drone strikes, and terrorist violence in Pakistan from 2003 to 2017 were counted as 62253, including 21842 civilians. The majority of these fatalities were in the Pashtun regions of FATA and KP. The available data shows that in KP, the fatalities from 2011 to 2017 were counted as total of 3976, including 2146 civilians, while the fatalities in FATA from 2006 to 2017 were counted as total 28748, including 4575 civilians (*The South Asian Terrorism Portal*)

Though both the state of Pakistan and its people are currently more anti-Taliban, they failed to resolve the serious concern of Pashtun and thus resulted in the growing alienation among Pashtun of FATA and KP. In the war on terror, the Pashtun of FATA and KP cooperated with the security forces of Pakistan. However, the war on terror also misled certain discourses about Pashtun "a natural bent for violence," whereas some controversial texts. The Taliban ideology remained detrimental to Pashtun culture.

Through violence and terror, such type of ideology was imposed on Pashtun in the decade-long war against the Soviet Union, where "Pakistan offered the culture and people of the tribal region as a present to US plans and jihadi forces." Even the strategic games did not allow Pakistan to integrate the frontier belt in the national life and thus added to the troubles of life of Pashtuns ([Salaman, 2012, 344-345](#)).

According to a Pashtun nationalist Afrasiab Khattak, for decades, Pakistan's Afghan policy of 'strategic depth' was formulated by the "Punjabi ruling elite," and executed by the security establishment". Since then, "military means the main instrument for the implementation of Talibanisation, it has involved death and destruction on a large scale, deepening Pashtun alienation to dangerous proportions". He further added that such policy "is totally unacceptable for Pashtun living in Pakistan," and all Pashtun political parties demanding to end it.

The region of FATA has been used by Pakistan as a "launching pad" for its three undeclared wars in Afghanistan in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2001. The government of Pakistan failed to stop the infiltration

of terrorists to FATA from Afghanistan and thus "turned it into a hell for the Pashtun living there." Whenever clashes erupted between security forces and terrorists, Pashtun was "get caught up in the crossfire" and thus resulted in the killing of hundreds of Pashtun civilians, including tribal elders. Afrasiab Khattak concluded that "as long as Pakistan actively supports Taliban's war in Afghanistan, FATA will be kept as a back hole and no go area." And "it will remain a socio political backyard and a bleeding wound despite the high sounding rhetoric of the authorities" ([Khattak, 2016](#)).

Conclusion

Since Pakistan's joining the US-led war on terror in 2001, the Pashtun populations saw operational attacks, cross-border attacks, mortar shells, clashes between security forces and militant/terrorists, target

killing, drone strikes, kidnapping, and clashes between various militants' organizations and with tribal clashes, suicide attacks, and bomb blasts, etc. These incidents not only killed thousands of civilians, including children and women but also violated the local codes of life. It caused business losses, destructions of infrastructure, markets, homes, schools building, and much more. Violence and terrorism speeded in Pashtun populations, and a fear of their existence remained at the outrage in these years. Millions of people were compelled to leave their homes, towns, cities and remained internally displaced, which caused instability in the Pashtun areas. Thus the land of Pashtun, in particular, the province of KP and FATA, remained the worse affected regions in the war against terrorism. No nation in the world is so suffering in the war against terrorism as Pashtun, and thus the war on terror is considered by many a war against Pashtun.

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