



Implications of Drone Strikes on Pakistan during USA War on Terror: An Analysis

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Abstract: USA strategists dwelled strategy of drone strikes to kill terrorists in War on Terror. The effectiveness of drone strikes remained debatable both in defense and academic circles. Some have of the opinion that it paid a lot for USA with minimum collateral damage and it helped US forces in locating and targeting terrorists. While some found this strategy ineffective to achieve any noticeable goals Pakistan was effected with this counterterrorism strategy of USA forces. This work is aimed at digging out that how this strategy of tracing and targeting terrorists with drone attacks resulted in severe short as well as long term implications for Pakistan. Data for this work has been collected from different available sources like research articles, books and reports of government agencies. Qualitative data analysis technique has been used for accumulated data to understand the phenomenon in better way.

Key Words: Implications, Counterterrorism, Extremism, Administration, Strategy

Introduction

Administrations under Bush and Obama used the option of drone strikes to target terrorists and their hideout not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan. Smith and Walsh (Walsh, 2013) mentioned that the objective of USA was to defeat Al- Qaeda and other terrorist groups on both Afghanistan and Pakistan territory. Series of drone attacks became more intensive during Obama administration especially after killed of Osama Bin Laden. Bin Laden was the most wanted person in WOT with \$ 30 million (2017) as his head money. President Obama could not separate his ways from Pakistan in WOT, so decided to achieve goals by making Pakistan agree to target terrorists by drones. The main reason behind the use of drones was to minimize the risk of losses to military

personals of USA and NATO forces. Schneider and MacDonald (2016) described that USA used unnamed aerial vehicle (UAV) to mitigate risk to its fighting forces. Effectiveness of the drone strategy remained debatable in defense and academic circles. Some have of the opinion that it paid a lot for USA with minimum collateral damage. Jordan (2010) argues that some of the policy makers and academics favored the targeting of terrorist leaders. Gray (2014) also describes that drones helped USA forces to locate and target the terrorist. Some found this strategy ineffective to achieve any noticeable goals. Hoffman (2009) holds that news of homegrown organization is a myth and that it is also not true that central command of Al-Qaeda involve in planning terrorist activity. Whatever was the case, the option of drone

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strategy for counterterrorism resulted in many Implications for Pakistan.

USA Logics behind Drone Attacks in Pakistan

Drones have been used by USA military forces first time in Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo. The purpose of those drones was surveillance of the areas only. But in Afghan war use of drones to target the territories remained the part of USA WOT in Afghanistan (Khan A. N., 2011). The momentum of these cross border attacks accelerated with the passage of time. Both Bush and Obama administrations followed the policies of drone attacks on Pakistan territories, but attacks have been escalated during Obama presidency. Geographical location, common history, tribal connectivity, cultural similarity along with several other factors could never stop the people at bordering areas to cross Pak-Afghan border in daily routine. So USA provided the following reasons and logics for drone attacks on Pakistan territory in pursuance of terrorists (Murphy, 2009).

- Taliban who could not face USA attacks succeeded to flee into the bordering areas of Pakistan. The top leadership including Osama bin Laden was claimed to get refuge in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan.
- Remnants of Afghan Taliban continued to fight against new installed government in Afghanistan. These Taliban got moral and logistic support from Afghan brethren at Pakistani side of border Roberts (2009) states that Al-Qaeda got support from Pakistani side of border. These Taliban reorganized and started to resist Afghan government along with their supporters, especially USA forces. So, USA and Afghan forces found themselves helpless against guerilla warfare of these Taliban.
- Some of the tribal elders were not happy on Pakistan support to USA and allied forces in Afghanistan. This anger resulted in Taliban movement in Pakistan, known as Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). These fighters gathered under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud and some other tribal leader to take weapons against Pakistani

government. The activities of TTP remained focused in Pakistan territory but their activities encouraged Afghan Taliban to fight against USA forces in Afghanistan.

- USA leadership itself was not happy with counterterrorism activities and efforts of Pakistan on its own territory. Even some of the political leadership and analysts started to blame Pakistan as failed state. Dinstein (2009) elaborates that terrorists in other state can be perused if that state is unable to take action against such elements by itself.
- Drone attacks were attractive for USA strategists as there was no threat to the military personals. The drones were being controlled a place away from real battlefield.
- Drone attacks were cost effective. It is estimated that drones cost 30 (thirty) times less than fighting jets. Moreover, no extensive training is required to operate drones.
- It was also claimed that drone attacks remained accurate and precise. John Kerry the than secretary claimed that 14 out of 20 terrorists have been killed by the drone attacks (Khan A. N., 2011).
- It was not possible for USA forces to peruse the terrorist in difficult terrain and harsh climate of the region.

So it is easy to understand that why USA opted for drone attacks to kill the remnants of terrorist that succeeded to get refuge in bordering areas of Pakistan. Drone strikes remained the significant toll of USA counterterrorism strategy. USA policy makers under both Bush and Obama administration thought not to tolerate the terrorist who found safe heavens in some remote territories of Pakistan. Minimizing of collateral damages further convinced USA to peruse the strategy of assassination of terrorist by drone attacks (Bayman, 2013).

Issues for Elected Government

Increase of drone strikes on Pakistan territory created many issues for its elected governments. These drone attacks did not only undermine legitimacy of elected government but also had deep impacts on political stature

of party in power. The opposition left no corner to turn in criticizing the weakness of the government. Questions were raised for inability of sitting government to defend sovereignty of the state. Kindervater (2016) elaborated the same when commented that drone attacks out sides of Afghanistan and Iraq has changed the concept of territory and sovereignty. Even it was blamed that government provided covert permission for these drone attacks. It was perceived that the government is unable to stops USA drone strikes on its territory. Such failure of defending the territorial integrity was a challenge for legitimacy of the government. Mr. Zardari president of Pakistan said that explanation of regular drone strikes is not easy for an elected government (Glyn, 2010). As sovereign equality is a leading principle of international law (Simpson, 2004) so these were not only government officials but analysts and academicians also criticized USA drone attacks in Pakistan. In response to USA drone strategy, Aslam (2011) demonstrated that USA as major power must respond legitimately and legally in its drone strikes. Discussions on drone strikes between USA and Pakistani officials were at its peak after killing of Pakistan forces in a drone attack. Coverage of these attacks by Pakistani media made it difficult for the government to avoid frustration and anger of public. USA was ready to provide detail of drone strikes but only after accomplishing the task. USA officials had fear of pre- attack information leakage so avoided to share it with authorities in Pakistan. Though complaints have been received from Pakistan government but Pakistan never ordered its forces to shoot these drones. It has also been revealed that Pakistani authorities have given covert permission to USA for drone strikes on its territory (Boyle, 2013). Therefore, at one side several terrorists were killed by these drone attacks but on the other side these attacks created lot of issues for elected government.

Killing of Innocent Citizen

The most painful reality of USA drone attacks in Pakistan was the killing of innocent citizen. Killing and damages to innocent people cannot be justified even on the grounds of following or targeting terrorists. USA officials and some of the analyst like Berger and Tiedemann

(Tiedemann, 2011) claimed that only fewer citizens were killed by drone strikes. On the other hand, some of the analysts pointed out the miscalculations about killing of civilians was presented by some newspapers. Bachman (2017) claimed that New York Times and Washington past is presenting wrong picture of civilian casualties by drone strikes in Pakistan. Iqbal (2014) elaborated that Prime Minister (PM) of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif raised the question of drone attacks in 68th ministerial session of United Nation General Assembly (UNGA). The PM demanded that drone strikes must be done under the rules of International Law. Attacking terrorists on Pakistan territory was violation of integrity of Pakistan. Such drone strikes were also resulting in assassination of innocent Pakistani citizens. These killing of innocent people had resulted in difficulties for Pakistan to fight against terrorists. The prime minister demanded from General Assembly to stop these drone strikes to avoid further casualties. These were not only Pakistani officials or public who raised the voices against drone attacks but some Europeans even Americans were criticizing these attacks. Ahmad, Jenkins and Iftikhar (2017) commented that drone strikes in Pakistan have become the topic of discussion at international forums especially UN. The conditions of drone attacks never remained useful or comfortable for Pakistani governments or public. Both these sectors continued to criticize drone attacks at different times and forums. Cordesman and Vira (2011) highlighted those USA military actions with in Pakistan boundaries were condemned by government officials as well by the public.

Root Cause of Extremism

Use of drones may payed USA in its counterterrorism strategy but it proved a cause for increasing extremism in Pakistan. Propagation by terrorists and hidden agendas of some anti-Pakistani elements in society fueled the fire in already deteriorated law and order situation. Violation of human rights, casualties of innocent people along with many other reasons paved the way for extremist activities in Pakistan. Shah (2018) explained that killing of innocent people by USA drone attacks caused blowback and radicalized local population. At first terrorist of Afghanistan

escaped into Pakistani territories later they started to exploit the situation and indulged in extremist activities with the help of some other fighting groups. Johnson and Sarbahi (2016) explained the following four reasons for extremist violence in Pakistan.

- i. Terrorists and extremists in Pakistan intend to punish and threaten the supporters and informers who were providing assistance to USA forces to locate and target them. The terrorists were well aware of the situation that drones cannot be target without human intelligence.
- ii. Civilians always prove soft targets for terrorist activities. Lack of government writ and absence of military in the region made their goals easy to achieve. Therefore, terrorist did not face any such resistance in establishing their sanctuaries in FATA
- iii. The local people had sympathies for terrorist groups, as it was propagated that these groups are fighting for the cause of Muslims and Islam. In this situation the environment was conducive for terrorists to get support and recruit new fighters for their notorious cause. Terrorists succeeded to establish their strong holds and intelligence network that were highly dependent on human intelligence.
- iv. Killing of innocent people in drone attacks aggravated the problems for government as well as USA forces. The members of effected families never hesitated to side with terrorist and took weapons against counterterrorist forces.

USA drone strategy that remained part and parcel in its WOT in Afghanistan was remained counterproductive. At one stage it killed some of the terrorists while on the other it resulted in recruitment of new terrorists who were from effected families of these drones. Though the control of drones was shifted from CIA to Military forces and accuracy was improved but drones did not win war for USA (Tiedemenn, 2011). Some of the terrorist groups stood against elected governments in Pakistan. These groups blamed Pakistan to side with non-Muslim against warriors that were fighting for Islamic cause.

Spread of Insurgency to Big Cities of Pakistan

No doubt drone attacks remained effective in targeting Taliban leaders of both first and second command in FATA. The network of terrorists has been disrupted as the hideouts and sanctuaries were destroyed by drone strikes. Terrorist decided to move to some rural and urban areas to avoid more damages in war focused areas. Some moved towards mountainous areas to get shelter and avoid direct clashes with counterterrorism forces. Other found their safe places in rural or urban areas. Thick forests of rural area provided them shelter from counterterrorism operations. Those who succeeded to flee to the cities camouflaged themselves in thick populated areas. Though terrorist were dispersed but they never sit in calm. They started their notorious activities in their concerned areas. Ahmad (2010) highlighted, Pakistan efforts to eliminate terrorist had resulted in rising insurgency within its own boundaries. In rural areas the terrorists enjoyed advantages of mountainous terrain and climate as they were much familiar with geographical and weather conditions of these areas. On the other side counterterrorism forces especially USA forces were unaware about this difficult terrain and climate. History has several evidences that foreign forces of many major powers failed to achieve their military objectives in these areas. The local fighters can be dispersed but not be defeated by any foreign military forces. It is really that geographical conditions can weaken a strong party while strengthen the weaker one (Irshad, 2011).

The terrorists did not remain limited to rural or mountainous eras. Many of them moved to the main cities. The terrorist activities increased in Pakistan (Abbasi, 2013) as the terrorist were spread to the main cities. It was comparatively easy for them to get refuge in thickly populated cities. They felt themselves secure in cities, as counterterrorism activities especial the drone attacks were not easy to conduct in populated areas. Moreover, unlike rural areas they were not recognized by the people of cities, so human intelligence and surveillance in cities remained difficult as compare to rural areas. As terrain was comfortable and transportation was available in cities so they could move easily from one

place to another. It was also easy for terrorist groups to spread fear of their activities in populated areas as the disturbance of peace always is one the main objective of terrorist (Zain Ul Abiden Malik, [2019](#)).

Internally Displaced Person (IDPs) Crisis

War like situation always results in displacement of people of that particular area. In line with USA policies in the region, Pakistan took very strict actions against terrorist groups within its own territories. Pakistan defense forces started several counterterrorism operations in turbulent areas. The most affected areas were of FATA and adjacent bordering territories. These areas remained the center of Taliban activities (Mohsin, [2013](#)). Armed conflicts were at peak in these areas and resulted in IDPs crises. IDPs are the people who are compelled by insecure situation to leave their homes and shifted in some other areas of the same state. They are different from refugees in their position and status. IDPs are entitled same rights, security and other status as the other citizens of state do. Although international community can offer assistance to settle IPDs and their relevant issue but primarily it is the responsibility of that particular state to deal the situation. Mooney ([2005](#)) explained the following twelve responsibilities of a government towards IDPs.

- i) Prevention of displacement and decrease its effects up to its minimum level
- ii) Creation of national awareness about the prevailing issue
- iii) Collection of data about condition and total number of IDPs
- iv) Assisting training on IDPs rights
- v) Creation of legal framework to endorse IDPs rights
- vi) Development of national policy on the issue
- vii) Designation of institutional focal point for IDPs
- viii) Encouragement of human rights organization to integrate the issue in their activities
- ix) To ensure the participation of IDPs in national decision making processes
- x) To work for durable solutions
- xi) Allocation of adequate resources for tackle the issue

- xii) Cooperation with international community if state capacity remains insufficient to meet the goals.

Pakistan forces started several operations to eliminate terrorist from its territory. These efforts remained fruitful and achieved the target but IDPs crises was the direct impact of these counterterrorism strategies. Around 3 million people were displaced from their homes during counterterrorism strategy. The main areas from where the people were displaced included Swat, Dir, Malakand and South Waziristan (Ishrat Afshan Abbasi, [2020](#)). It is not wrong that counterterrorism operations by Pakistan defense forces caused IDPs crises (Din, [2010](#)).

Conclusion

Drone attacks started by president Bush was not only continued but intensified by his successor. Both Obama and Bush administrations did not care even the sovereignty of Pakistan during its counterterrorism campaign. Terrorist were followed within Pakistan boundaries. It was the same drone attacks that deteriorated Pak-US bilateral ties. A bill has been passed against such drone attacks by the parliament of then government in Pakistan. US had to take some diplomatic steps to defuse the situations. Drone strategy of Bush as well as Obama administration killed both friends and foes. Killing of innocent citizens made the general public furious and it resulted in anti-American sentiments among general public that damaged the efforts to defeat terrorists in the region. In reaction of such drone strikes people of effected areas stood against government of Pakistan. The security situation in Pakistan became more severe with challenges to government writ in some northern areas. Social fabric of Pakistan was also received shocks and aftershocks of drone strategy. People of these areas had to move to some other areas of Pakistan. The issues of these IDPs proved an extra burden on government. These displaced people at one side themselves were hard to tackle on the other had spillover implications for both state and society. Therefore, it is not hard to analyze that Pakistan lost much during USA foreign policies of Bush and Obama administration towards South Asia.

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