



## A Saga of Decisive Combat of Pakistan Army in North and South Waziristan (2009-2016)

- DOI: 10.31703/gsssr.2022(VII-II).08      ▪ URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2022\(VII-II\).08](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2022(VII-II).08)  
▪ Vol. VII, No. II (Spring 2022)      ▪ Pages: 61 – 72      ▪ p-ISSN: 2708-2121      ▪ e-ISSN: 2708-3616

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**Abstract:** *The entire security landscape of the world was altered due to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America's World Trade Centre. After this incident, the US accused Al-Qaeda headship of the attacks. Henceforth, President Bush demanded the Afghan Taliban hand over Osama Bin Laden to the US. However, when the Taliban did not respond positively, the US attacked Afghanistan. The US also pushed Pakistan to take a U-turn on its Afghan policy; hence, President Musharraf decided to offer logistics and other relevant backing to the American forces in their operation in Afghanistan. After the defeat of the Afghan Taliban in 2002, many militants from Afghanistan came to Pakistan's tribal areas through a porous border. As Pakistan supported the US War on Terrorism (WoT), a militant insurgency was started in the tribal areas of Pakistan. This research examines the counter-terrorism strategies of the Pakistan army that it implemented from 2009 to 2016. The study explains the military operations of the Pakistan army in former FATA against hardcore terrorist groups like Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other small and affiliated radical organizations. It is analyzed that military operations namely Rah-e-Nijat and Zarb-e-Azb in former FATA with a focus on North and South Waziristan relatively remained successful.*

**Key Words:** Terrorism, 9/11, FATA, Waziristan, TTP, Pakistan Army, Zarb e Azb

### Introduction

Since long, the area of FATA (Federal Administrated Tribal Areas) has been an entryway to the subcontinent for raiders like Aryans, Alexander and the Mughals who crossed the region to conquer India ("FATA Reforms", 2016, p. 16). FATA is situated on the western border with Afghanistan and within Pakistan and consists of seven agencies i.e. Bajour agency, Mohmand agency, Khyber agency, Kuram agency, Orakzai Agency, South Waziristan and North Waziristan agency" (Shah, 2018, p. 3). Furthermore, six smaller pockets known as frontier regions (FRs) are also part of it. These areas are FR Bannu, FR Dera Ismail Khan, FR Kohat, FR Lakki Marwat, FR Peshawar and FR Tank. (Yousaf, Rasheed & Gul, 2018, p. 8).

FATA is the only statutory part of Pakistan where the government could not implement its rules and regulations during the period from 1947 to 2018. Under article 247's (6) amendment the constitutional status of FATA could not be changed without the acceptance of tribal Maliks (Jadoon, 1997, p. 7). At last on May 28, 2018, FATA was merged into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and hence lost its constitutional identity (Wasim, 2018). Talibanization was deep-rooted in FATA during President Zia ul Haq's regime in Pakistan (1977-1988). This was the policy against the Soviet Union that invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Pakistan's government supported mujahedeen and trained the youth for the purpose of jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union (Bukhari, p. 188). Very firstly FATA has been the hotbed of

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Taliban and groups of Taliban were grown in the area (Lian, [2010](#), p. 86).

The 9/11 incident transformed the scenery of the world (Green, [2017](#)). The US held responsible Al-Qaeda whose leader was Osama Bin Laden (OBL) for the assaults on World Trade Centre (WTC) and demanded it hand over them to the US ("What were the 9/11", 2022). However, the Afghan Taliban government led by Mullah Umar denied the orders of the US. Therefore, President Bush (2001-2009) decided to fight against global terrorism and invaded Afghanistan (Hussain, [2018](#), p. 158). The US also forced Pakistan to take a U-turn on its Afghan policy; hence, President Musharraf (2001-2008) decided to provide logistic and other relevant assistance to the American forces in their operation in Afghanistan. After the defeat of the Afghan Taliban in 2002, many militants from Afghanistan entered Pakistan's tribal areas through a porous border between the two neighbours. As Pakistan sided with the US in WoT and became a frontline state and even US declared Pakistan a Non-NATO Ally of the US in 2004, a militant insurgency was started in the tribal areas of Pakistan. It is a fact that religious extremism and terrorism were a cost of small benefits that Pakistan gained ("Status of non-Nato", 2004). Since 2002, there was violence everywhere in the country carried out by TTP and other terrorist organizations ("Foreign Travel Advice", 2022). To get rid of the threat of terrorism Pakistan army conducted various military operations in tribal areas. Pakistan military conducted its first large-scale military operations like Rah-e-Nijat in 2009 and Zarb-e-Azab in 2014 held in former FATA.

### Significance and Scope

The aim of the research is to study the various factors behind the success of the Pakistan army and its role against terrorism in former FATA. The study is significant because it highlights the efforts and struggle of the Pakistan military against terrorism in FATA basically Waziristan. The scope of the study is narrow and limited to review only two operations i.e operation Rah-i-Nijat happened from 2009 to 2010 in South Waziristan agency and operation Zarb-e- Azb conducted from 2014 to 2016 in the area of North Waziristan agency of former FATA.

### Method

The study is written from descriptive and historical perspectives. The inquiry mode of research is applied with a special focus on qualitative research. Data and information regarding the study are gathered through desk research for which a review of literature focusing on primary and secondary sources like books, articles, and internet material is done.

### Operation Rah-e-Nijat (Path to Salvation)

In June 2009, the Pakistan army completed the mission against the militants in Swat valley. Soon after the clearance of this area army turned to South Waziristan for launching small scales operations against Baitullah Mehsud's militant group. Militants of the Mehsud group reacted against the step of the military and launched a large-scale attack on the military in North Waziristan Agency. Militants attacked with the help of heavy rocket launchers and other heavy weapons. Many military vehicles were destroyed in this attack. During the exchange of fire between military and militants at least 10 militants and 12 soldiers were killed and 10 soldiers were wounded. After this attack military destroyed two militant compounds and killed 8 militants in the South Waziristan Agency (SWA) which was the stronghold area of Baitullah Mehsud. Later on, the Pakistani government launched a large-scale military operation in the area of the South Waziristan Agency with more military troops ("Taliban kill 12", 2009). This operation was planned against TTP, an anti-state group which was settled in South Waziristan Agency. After the breaking of peace agreements which were held between the Pakistan government and TTP, the administration took the step of launching offensive operations. The government wanted to solve the conflicts through negotiations but its efforts were not successful. The provincial government of KPK and the federal government of Pakistan failed to negotiate with the local Taliban. Therefore, the Pakistan army launched large scales operations against the Mehsud group. A very first step taken by the Pakistan army was to capture all exits and entrance routes and established check posts. For the first time, Pakistan Air Force (PAF) became part of the operation with Artillery and Army Aviation which contributed and served

during this operation. On 5 August 2009, Baitullah Mehsud was killed in a drone attack. Although Hakimullah Mehsud was appointed as the new leader of TTP yet the death of Baitullah created a favourable environment for launching an operation in the area. Therefore, on 16 October 2009, then Chief of Army Staff, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani briefed the senior political leadership and prime minister on the favourable position of beginning operation in South Waziristan Agency. Pakistan military finally openly launched an independent operation on 16 October 2009 (Salik, [2019](#), p. 113).

A total of 28000 military troops were deployed in South Waziristan Agency and the total strength of militants was estimated approximately 8000 to 10000 local and 1500 foreign militants with Uzbek, Chechen, Chinese Uighurs, Arabic and some belonged to other origins. When the operation was started a difficult task for the army was to take local people in confidence. For this purpose army announced that the aim of the operation was only to target militants, not innocent tribal people (Malik, [2009](#), p. 8). Overall command and control of operation were handed over to XI Corps with three sub-divisions: the 7<sup>th</sup> division was settled in Miranshah; the 9<sup>th</sup> division in Wana and 14<sup>th</sup> deployed to Jandola and other troops were engaged in operation including Frontier Corps (FC) two infantry Brigades, two Special Services Group (SSG) battalion and other units. During the operation infantry battalions with heavy equipment and artillery conducted ground petrol, as well as armour unit, served with battle tanks, and Air force and army aviation served with high combated aircraft and gunship helicopters (Khan, [2012](#), p.137).

In the initial days of operation Rah-e-Nijat, the military faced the situation very professionally and reached near the residencies of militants. In the case of attacks, the military conducted assaults very carefully and targeted only militant bases. At first military conducted attacks with heavy gunship helicopters, machine guns and aircraft but all attacks were conducted consciously and civilians of South Waziristan Agency (SWA) were secured during military attacks this thing showed the consciousness and

professionalism of the Pakistan military during operation (“Operation Rah-i-Nijat”, 2009).

Pakistan military treated local Taliban and Al-Qaeda operatives very strictly and hardly. It conducted rapidly heavy attacks on the locations of militants in mountainous areas in order to compel them to abide by the laws. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, the offensive military captured the heights of mountains from militants. Those mountain heights were strategically very valuable for the military. During this offensive attack, 9 soldiers were martyred by militants and 78 militants were killed by the military (“Pakistan push into”, 2009).

During the operation of Rah-e-Nijat, the role of the Pakistan Air force was clearly highlighted as Quick Reaction Force (QRF) because pilots of air crafts were ready any time for faster reaction armed aircraft were positioned before time in air bases and gave the Combat Air Petrol (CAP). In the case of an air strike against militants, intelligence agencies shared information with General Head Quarter (GHQ) and Air Head Quarter (AHQ). There were air sports teams that were organized during operation and two-star PAF officers commanded the team and were directly attached to GHQ. The drone technology of Pakistan was not able to carry the weapons from one place to another place but those technologies only provided photos and video surveillance during operation Rah-e-Nijat. The PAF drone technology facilitated the military on a high-profile scale. In the first phase of operation in case of a land offensive, PAF attempted 150 targets against militants and lose the momentum of the enemy (Hussain, [2021](#)). Operation Rah-e-Nijat was the first combat which was completely organized by the Pakistan military. In this operation, the military makes the strategy for ground militancy against military elements and distributes its targets in three directions of the South Waziristan Agency. Pakistan military conducted overall operations under three strategic battle-axes (Khattak, [2009](#)).

- Jandola\_Sararogha axis.
- Shakai\_Kaniguram axis.
- Razmak\_Makeen axis.

### Ground Search during Operation Rah-e-Nijat

In an in-ground search of South Waziristan Agency during operation, Rah-i-Nijat Pakistan military found heavy and light weapons. Those weapons were made by Pakistan and foreign countries. Pakistan military also discovered Indian-made medicines in the area. Pakistan military searched important papers related to intelligence reports in this region. In heavy weapons, there were single barrel rocket launchers, light machine guns (LMG) and Chinese-type weapons including 12.7mm machine guns and heavy anti-aircraft 14.5 mm machine guns were handed over to the military. There was a Mosque in every house of the South Waziristan agency and militant groups hid all the weapons in Mosques and Madrassas (Azam, Ehsan & Kashif, 2009). Sararogha was the key point of militants and was considered a safe haven for militancy. In Sararogha's ground, search military discovered IEDs, (Improvise Explosive Devices) Ammunition and weapons. In the initial stage of searching operation, the military discovered 70 IEDs, and 21 suicide jackets in the area of Sararogha (Shafiq, Farukh & Mansoor, 2009).

If Operation Rah-e-Nijat is analyzed thoroughly then it is considered very tough combat against militants because militants retaliated very hard and showed very tough resistance against the military. The very first aspect of retaliation was foreign involvement with militants especially Indian investment considered as uprooted militancy in the area of South Waziristan Agency. Ammunition and weapons of India showed a clear image of RAW involvement in Sararogha town where a number of militants were detected during a ground search by the military. They were trained in RAW camps and arrested in the region of the South Waziristan Agency and other cities of Pakistan including Sialkot and Lahore (Malik, 2009, p. 8).

In the case of financial funding to militants, there was full aid and funding from RAW. Meanwhile, it is reported that many large private donors from all over the world and especially from the Gulf States had given many funds and other things to the militants in the area. Local militants and terrorists generated funds through trading opium, smuggling,

criminal activities and kidnapping. They also purchased suicide bombers' jackets and several bombs on large scale for terrorist activities. There were a number of foreign intelligence agencies which supported terrorists in the area. At one stage of the operation, the military decided to talk with militants, however, they denied talks with Army. During the search operations, the military discovered foreign currency of Gulf States in the region of South Waziristan Agency (Hilaly, 2009, p. 5).

### Achievements of Operation Rah- e-Nijat

Pakistan military conducted operation Rah-e-Nijat

speedily with a planned strategy. In the case of Jandola, ground forces of the Pakistan military captured the area of Jandola very quickly and took access from Jandola to Sararogha. The area of Sararogha was the main hub of Baitullah Mehsud's TTP group. In January 2008, Baitullah Mehsud started anti-state activities in this area. During the Sararogha operation, 30 militants were killed and 7 soldiers were martyred (Shafiq, Fakhar & Mansoor, 2009). At the same time in Sararogha army attacked the places of Uzbek militants. They retaliated forcefully and the military faced huge difficulties but the spirit of the military was very high. During that combat Uzbek militants posed tough resistance to the military. But the military eliminated their resistance with the help of Tanks, Artillery and Air Force. After some retaliation activities, ground forces of the Pakistan military took the area of Uzbek militants (Azam et al, 2009).

In Jandola, the Saraogha axis moved from South East to North, 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry division troops captured the area of Spinkai Raghzai after facing resistance by militants. In the move to Kotkai troops captured very quickly the area of Kotkai which was the central hub of Hakimullah Mehsud and Qari Hussain. In this area troops seized surrounding strategic heights of mountains, in the case of Kotkai militants created very tough resistance for the military but after two days of struggle, the military covered the area of Kotkai. The camps and Homes of Qari Hussain and Hakimullah Mehsud were destroyed by the military. Finally, on starting day of the second week, the military took over complete control of Kotkai

town and moved toward Sararogha. Military troops advanced and captured high ground and also captured surrounding towns which were situated on the way of Sararogha. Aerial bombardment supported the military during this move. During this operation, the military advanced along the next axis and secured strategic surrounding areas. In the first phase of the Jandola -Sararogha axis military covered and completely secured this area after 18 days of struggle. This area was the main hub of militants therefore; military troops faced very tough resistance to rocket attacks by militants. After 31 days of operation, the military took control of the area of Ahmad wam. In Shakai - Kaniguram second axis of operation was created from Shakai, Wana to Ladha's direction and the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry division was lead this axis. This axis was South West to North. In this axis, the operation was conducted towards Tiarza, Wana, Sherwangai and Shakai after facing tough resistance military captured the important strategic heights after 7 days of operation and secured the area of Sherwangai. After 4 weeks of struggle, the military took complete control and consolidate this area. On the third axis, North to South Razmak Makeen's 7<sup>th</sup> infantry division took the position in this area. Initially military moved Razmak to Nawaz kot. During this move, the military faced hurdles from militants in this area. Militants operated with rocket attacks on army camps whereas the military responded with Aerial bombardment. Military occupied the towns of Band Khel, Tozachena and Mian Noor Khel in the first advance. After 21 days of consolidation troops entered the area of Makeen for the purpose of securing this area. In this region, the military faced resistance for 7 days and destroyed the house of Baitullah Mehsud. After that military seized and secured this area. This operation was well organized and distributed in three directions. The Military faced very tough resistance in all directions. It showed bravery and captured the area of the South Waziristan Agency (Haider, [2010](#)).

In December 2009, military ground forces took the control of most of the territory of Sararogha, Ladha and Makin. TTP adopted the strategy to leave the territory of the South Waziristan Agency; therefore, TTP militants left the territory and relocated to different areas of other agencies. Militants migrated to

Orakzai, Kurram and North Waziristan Agency and some migrated to Shawal valley. South Waziristan Agency is located on the Afghanistan border on the side of Pakistan; therefore, some militants migrated to Afghanistan through the Afghan border. Pakistan military forces took control of Mehsud areas and destroyed the command and control of TTP. At the end of December 2009, 11 corps temporarily left the area of South Waziristan Agency. After leaving the area by the military, militants again became active in the area of the South Waziristan Agency. TTP started small attacks as well as big attacks. They attacked the mosque in Rawalpindi with grenades and gunfires. In that attack, 36 people were killed including 7 military officials and 45 persons were wounded. After that incident, the Pakistan military carried out an attack on the locations of militants and cleared the area of the South Waziristan Agency (Jones & Fair, [2010](#), pp.73-74).

### **Military Served for Innocent Locals during Operation Rah-e-Nijat**

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In order to root out terrorism from tribal areas, Operation Rah-e-Nijat was launched. Pakistan Army continued its traditions and helped the civilian population. Medical teams consisted of various specialists who organized regular "free medical campuses" in North and South Waziristan agencies in which thousands of patients, including men, women and children, were given free medical facilities including medicines. The efforts were made to play the role in the management of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons). There were all necessary facilities present in the IDPS camps at DI Khan and Nowshera. Meanwhile, the military convoy had all the necessary medical and first aid equipment for IDPs. These relief operations were carried out in conjunction with military operations (Raja, [2009](#), p. 10).

### **Activities of TTP in North Waziristan Agency (2011-2014)**

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In 2009, the Pakistan army conducted a large scales military operation in South Waziristan Agency. This operation was the first open combat against terrorists including TTP. Due to this operation TTP left the territory of the South Waziristan Agency and all the terrorist groups

migrated to Afghanistan and North Waziristan Agency (NWA) (Jones & Fair, 2022, pp. 73-74). The security situation in Pakistan was not good from 2011 to 2013. Terrorist attacks increased with each passing day across the country (Zulfaqar, 2017, p. 118). Meanwhile, many other groups including the Haqqani Network, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Islamic Jihadist Group (IJG) created security threats to the military and state. Therefore, internationally Pakistan's image and reputation were at stake from 2011 to 2013 (Javed, 2016, p. 327). In 2012, militants attacked Kamra Air Base with heavy weapons including rocket grenades and automatic weapons. During the fight with militants, only one soldier lost his life and 8 militants were killed by the military. TTP had taken responsibility for this incident. The spokesman of the militants Ehsan-Ullah-Ehsan said that they were feeling proud of this attack and said that this action was revenge for the death of Al Qaeda's leader Osama Bin Laden. Hence militants claimed they destroyed 3 aircraft and killed 12 soldiers (Malik, 2012). During this era, there was a peak period of terrorism when terrorism penetrated its roots in Pakistan and created influence in the whole country. In the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) Pakistan was in 3<sup>rd</sup> position after Iraq and Afghanistan in 2013. It is reported that 37 per cent of death rate and 28 per cent of injuries were increased in terrorist attacks since 2012. In 2013 terrorists conducted 71 suicide attacks in which 2740 persons lost their lives. In 2013, Pakistan was the second largest country in death rate which was held to terrorist attacks ("Pakistan ranks third", 2014).

### **Negotiation Policy of the Pakistan Government**

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) came into power in 2013. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had to face many internal and external challenges. There were many security threats to the country because terrorism rooted day by day and the image of Pakistan was fell down on an international level. PML-N government decided to start talks with TTP for the purpose of improvement of security in the country. As the PML-N government wanted to negotiate with TTP and other militants in the area, therefore, the government called the All Parties Conference (APC) in Islamabad on September

9, 2013. PML-N led this conference and played important role in building confidence and reaching a collective decision. The other political parties like Pakistan People Party (PPP), Muttahida Quomi Movement and especially Awami National Party wanted to launch a military operation against TTP. However, later on, after APC they also supported the government's decision to dialogue with militants. Some other parties which had their representation in the provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtun Khawah like Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI), Jamiat Ulmah-e-Islam-Fazal-ur-Rehman group (JUI-F) also favoured the decision of government (Nazeer, 2017, pp. 122-123).

Against this backdrop, the government started a dialogue with TTP. It is noted that at that time approximately 56 small and large militant groups were working under the banner of TTP and posing security threats to government and state, especially in the FATA region which was very disturbed. However, the government wanted to engage TTP in dialogue in order to solve the conflict permanently (Basit, 2014, p. 8). It is interesting to note that the security threats were continued by militant groups even during the dialogue process with the government. The government of Pakistan made a multi-dimensional plan to counter the terrorists in Pakistan. This plan was known as National Internal Security Policy (NISP) which was launched on February 25, 2014. The purpose of that policy was to secure the national interests of Pakistan. In December 2013, the government of Pakistan established the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) for the purpose of counter-terrorism. (Ibrahim, et al, 2021, pp. 136-137).

On the other hand, TTP extended the terrorist attacks in Pakistan and underestimated the governance of the state and also created riots in the state. They also attacked security forces, and political leaders especially their target was foreigners, and private and public infrastructures (Javed, 2016, p. 116). The government of Pakistan wanted to deal with TTP and other militant groups including the Taliban, with a soft hand policy but during the negotiation process, TTP and other militant groups did not stop their activities and approximately 20 major attacks were held by militant groups. It is reported that

from January 29, 2014, to June 8, 2014, approximately 195 people were killed in militant attacks (Javed, [2016](#), p. 588). In 2014, the militant entered with uniforms in Karachi International Airport and conducted an attack with heavy guns. At least 23 people died during this attack. This attack diverted the focus of the military for operation in North Waziristan Agency (NWA) against militant groups ("Gunmen attack Karachi", 2014).

### Operation Zarb-e-Azb

Zarb-e-Azb word is derived from the strike of the sword of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) used in the battle of Badar and Uhud. Pakistan Army launched the operation against militants in North Waziristan Agency under the name of Zarb-e-Azb on June 15, 2014. It was a combined military strike which was conducted by the Pakistan military in North Waziristan Agency (NWA) and approximately 30000 soldiers contributed to this operation. This operation was the reaction to the terrorist attack on Jinnah International airport Karachi which was conducted by militants on June 8, 2014. Reportedly, 15 militants conducted that attack and 2500 security persons were engaged for 7 hours. There were many other security aspects to the operation and the military took a hard stance against militants in North Waziristan Agency. Militants also conducted attacks on military installations in South Waziristan Agency. There were four major objectives of Operation Zarb-e-Azab.

1. To destroy the influence of militant groups in the North Waziristan Agency.
2. To demolish the concealed locations and target the foreign terrorists who were operated from FATA.
3. To protect the civilians from the terror of TTP.
4. To maintain the peace and internal security of the state (Javed, [2016](#), p. 165).

The day of December 16, 2014, is considered a black day in Pakistan history because of a horrible incident was occurred in Peshawar. On that day six terrorists entered in Army Public School and College (APSAC) Warsak road Peshawar around 10: 30am through the graveyard which is back side of APSAC, with full fledge army dress and conducted an attack with heavy guns on the

students of Army Public School and College (APSAC). During the attack, approximately 149 people were killed by militants including 133 majorities of innocent students of APSAC Peshawar. After that government of Pakistan and the military took a hard stance against militants. This incident created the fear and panic of terrorism in the hearts of the whole nation of Pakistan. Against this backdrop, the government announced National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism (Asim & Bilal, [2017](#), p. 365).

### National Action Plan

After the deadly terror attack on APSAC, the Chief of Army Staff gave a statement that it was "the attack on the heart of Pakistan". After that time the implementation of the NAP policy was required because after the incident of APSAC whole nation felt the pain of the martyrs of APSAC every heart cried and was demanding for justice. There was a demand to take a hard stance and immediate crackdown against terrorists. After the incident whole nation had taken a stand against terrorism and extremism. The National Internal Security Policy (NISP) was introduced by the government before some time of the APSAC incident. APSAC attack demanded to focus on NIPS at the national level. For that purpose, 20 point agenda was made to curb the militants and extremist elements. The policy was approved on December 24, 2014, after the week of the APSAC incident (Elahi & Javed, pp. 441-442).

### 20 Points of National Action Plan (NAP)

1. "Execution of persons sentenced to death in terrorism case".
2. "Special trial courts under military supervision. The term of office of these courts in two years".
3. "Armed organizations and armed groups are not allowed to operate in the country".
4. "Strengthen the counter-terrorism agency (NACTA)".
5. "Severely crackdown on literature, newspapers and magazines that promote hatred extremes sectarianism and intolerance".
6. "Stifling financial support for terrorist and terrorist organization".

7. "Ensure the re-emergence of banned organizations".
8. "Establish and deploy a dedicated counter-terrorism force"
9. "Take effective measure to oppose religious persecution".
10. "Registration and management of religious schools".
11. "The glorification of terrorist organizations through print and electronic media is prohibited".
12. "Administrative and developmental reforms of FATA, with immediate attention to the return of internally displaced persons".
13. "Terrorist communication networks will be completely dismantled".
14. "Measures to prevent the misuse of internet and social media for terrorism".
15. "Zero tolerance for militants in Punjab".
16. "The ongoing actions in Karachi will lead to a logical conclusion".
17. The Baluchistan government should be fully empowered to achieve political reconciliation among all stakeholders".
18. "Severely crack down on sectarian terrorists".
19. "Develop a comprehensive policy to address the Afghan refugee problem, starting with the registration of all refugees".
20. "Reform the criminal justice system" ("National Counter Terrorism" 2014).

The national action plan was considered a milestone in eradication of terrorism. This plan was directly supervised by Prime Minister. Operation Zarb-e-Azb was totally different from other operations which were conducted by the Pakistan army in FATA. In this operation, a comprehensive model was introduced. The objectives of the comprehensive model were related to counter-terrorism strategy which was addressing distinctive aspects of terrorism. The comprehensive model had a unique character and structure to the scenario of Operation Zarb-e-Azb. The special characteristic of this operation was the government was deeply involved and the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) personally and deeply monitored this operation.

## The Uniqueness of Operation Zarb-e-Azb

The exceptionality of operation Zarb-e-Azb was that this operation was divided into four phases. Pakistan Army adopted a new strategy and conducted different sub-operations in the interval of this operation. The time duration of the operation was 2 years. The detail of the four phases is as under:-

- **Phase 1 (10<sup>th</sup> June to 20<sup>th</sup> August):** Meran Shah, Data Khel, Boya, Degan, Razmak and Dosali 7 sub-division covered.
- **Phase 2 (21<sup>st</sup> August to 11<sup>th</sup> September):** Ghulam Khan, Jhallar, Bichi area of NWA. 3 sub-divisions were covered.
- **Phase 3 (11<sup>th</sup> September to 26<sup>th</sup> September):** Spinwam and Shewa
- **Phase 4 (25<sup>th</sup> October to 2<sup>nd</sup> November):** Gharlamai Operation
- **Khyber I, Khyber II:** The operation was extended to the Khyber Agency (Elahi & Javed, pp. 442-444).

## Searching and Clearance

During the operation, the Pakistan military discovered approximately 20 to 25 tunnels in Meran Shah. Militants stayed easily in one tunnel. The military recovered heavy weapons from Meran Shah. The city was a hub of militants who conducted attacks with ammunition and grenades the destruction of compounds and spread fear and panic. Secondly, after the clearance of South Waziristan, North Waziristan Agency became a hub of suicide bombing. Gul Bahadur Khan led the militant group in the area of Meran Shah who left the area during the operation. In Machis village of Meran Shah, Uzbek and Al Qaeda militants were present. During the search operation of Machis, the village military discovered an ammunition factory and Potassium Chlorate which was used to make IEDs. Hence, the military discovered printed literature which was used as a tactic for training and motivation. Militants were using modern weapons as military discovered batteries, transmitters, live suicide jackets, radios, mobile phones, frequency chips and coloured printed training manuals. Meran Shah Bazar was the area of Arab IMU, East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and proper shops were established for selling and purchasing weapons (Sharif, [2014](#)).



In the area, the military faced hard resistance from militants. The military conducted 17 high-level attacks on militants. There were 389 militants killed during the operation. After that military announced the clearance of five main cities which were the hub of militants including Miran Shah, Mirali, Datta Khel, Boya, and Degan. When the operation was in its starting phase according to ISPR approximately 82 soldiers were martyred in the whole country and 42 soldiers were in North Waziristan Agency. At least 269 soldiers were injured who were fighting against militants in North Waziristan Agency. During this operation a new group Jamat-ul-Ahrar (JA) was allied with Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and both merged with each other (FATA Research, 2014, pp. 18-19).

### Operation Khyber-I

Pakistan military extend the Zarb-e-Azb operation in Khyber agency because the terrorist attacks were increased in Khyber agency. Due to the operation of the North Waziristan Agency, the terrorists left the territory and settled in the Khyber agency. Therefore, the Pakistan military launched military operations in Khyber agency also under the name of Khyber-I and that was part of operation Zarb-e-Azb. This operation was started on October 16, 2014. The military conducted 19 operational attacks. The purpose of this operation was the clearance of area from Lashkar e Islam (LI) militants (FATA Research, 2014, pp. 15-16). Khyber agency is covered by mountainous areas in this way military faced resistance and difficulties during operation Khyber I. In this area, the operation continued for three days. During this operation, sixteen soldiers and a Major were martyred, and many soldiers were wounded but after three days resistance military occupied the geographical position of the Khyber agency (Khan, 2015).

The main objective of operation Khyber I was to gain access to the area of the Bara subdivision which is situated between Khyber agency and Tirah valley. During this clearance initially military imposed a curfew in the area, entry and exit was not allowed in this area. All routes were blocked which led to Bara including Akakhel and Malik din Khel sipah clans. Military conducted Khyber I operation with the help of fighting jets and destroyed the

locations of Lashkar-i-Islam with heavy air bombardment. During the Barah operation there were 9 militants were killed and 10 were injured after the military took the control of Barah's area (Sherazi, 2014). After the end of Operation Khyber, Brigadier Zahid Khan in charge of the operation gave the detail of the whole Khyber I operation and said there were 100 militants killed 450 terrorists were arrested 17 military troops were injured in this operation. During the operation of Khyber I, 25 hard-core terrorists were arrested and it was the achievement of the Pakistan military (FATA Research, 2015, p. 13).

### Operation Khyber II

The military cleared the area of the Barah subdivision during operation Khyber I but the area of Tirah valley remained (FATA Research, 2015, p.13). Pakistan army conducted operation Khyber II for the purpose to regain control of Tirah valley. The area of Tirah valley was very tense military faced very heavy resistance in this area. The military conducted air bombardment through fighter jets to the destruction of militant locations. Terrorists were hidden in the area of Rajgal, Kukikhel and Dara Darmodarab the areas of Tirah valley. In the second quarter of 2015 military conducted 2 air strikes and killed 27 militants (Mehsud, et al, 2016, p. 15). During this operation military controlled 95% area of Tirah valley at last military cleared and windup this operation on June 15, 2015 (FATA Research, 2015, p. 15).

### Shawal Valley Operation: Tail of Zarb-e-Azb

Shawal valley operation was the last phase of operation Zarb-e-Azab. During this operation, the military faced many difficulties and resistance from militants. Militants adjust IEDs in houses and left the house when the military discovered a huge number of IEDs in the search operation of militant houses. Militants had made mud wall house in the central area of Shawal valley where the military discovered weapons, Stinger missile launchers and Russian-made guns during the operation. Sajna group and Sheryar Muhsu group including many foreign fighters were present in this area (Firdous, 2016). The area of Shawal valley was a suitable route for smuggling between

Afghanistan and Pakistan because this area was covered with forests and mountains. Militants established their bases in this area and conducted attacks on the military. Pakistan army conducted air strikes and drone attacks on the bases of militants (Javed, 2015, p. 47). During the operation of Shawal, the valley military captured 650 sq. km areas including the main hub of militants Mana, Garbaz, Lataka, Inzarkas and Magrotia was cleared. In this 252 militants were killed and 160 were injured whereas 8 soldiers of the Pakistan military were martyred and 39 were injured (Khan & Yousaf, 2016). In operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014 to 2016) approximately 4000 militants were killed and tons of ammunition, explosive units and IEDs were discovered in the areas of Mirali, Meran Shah including Shawal valley. Finally, after the clearance of Shawal valley military officials announced the end of the operation of Zarb-e-Azb ("Army declares Shawal", 2016).

## Conclusion

Since 1947 former FATA has been the constitutional part of Pakistan. Due 9/11 incident, Pakistan had to face terrorist activities in the country, especially in former FATA. Peace agreements have been made between state and militants in the FATA area but these efforts mostly remained failed. In FATA from 2009 to 2016 different large and small-scale operations were conducted by the Pakistan army to extinguish the hidden places and camps of terrorists. Pakistan's government took a hard position in operations in FATA to get cleaned the area from different terrorist groups. The reason for terrorism in FATA was

those terrorists who came from Afghanistan after the defeat of the Afghan Taliban in 2002. Secondly, Pakistan's decision to side with the US in the global war on terrorism and drone attacks on the local population annoyed local people against the state. Furthermore, mismanagement due to which government could not deliver properly also was a cause of disturbance in the area. There was no industry and people had no access to sources, therefore, people of FATA got involved including smuggling, drug addicting and killing. Various foreign powers started to use them in creating violence and do terrorist activities in Pakistan. Some militant groups convinced common people with the name of Jihad and start attacking state institutions. So the area of FATA was very disturbed.

In 2009 Pakistan army and government took a solid stance against terrorism and conducted the first large-scale operation in the area of the South Waziristan Agency. These operations were conducted only to get rid of militants. During these operations, the Pakistan military supported the common people of the South Waziristan Agency and took the control of this area. With the passage of time terrorist attacks began to subside but the migration of terrorists in different areas of FATA was not stopped. However, operation Zarb-e-Azb which lasted for two years was proved as a milestone in countering terrorism in North Waziristan Agency. Although Pakistan's army and the government faced many difficulties and resistance while conducting operations from 2009 to 2016 yet finally pulled the country out of the swamp of terrorism successfully.

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