

Major Threats to Pakistan in the Wake of US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: The Case of FATA and KP

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Afghanistan is the next down neighbor on the north west of Pakistan and both the countries are of immense geo-strategic and geo political importance for each other. Both the countries have certain degree commonality when it comes to culture, religion, history and ethnicity. But the conflicting position on Durand line, rise of militancy in the region and frequent blame games have turned them into rivals rather than friends. Since the Soviet occupation, Afghanistan posed a serious threat to Pakistan and the level of threat increased manifolds after US attacked Afghanistan for wiping the Taliban regime. The post 9/11 military action of the NATO forces put immense international pressure and compelled Pakistan to become the front line state in fighting the 'War on Terror'. Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) that became the sanctuary of militants owing to the porous Pak-Afghan border borne the brunt of the militancy along with the settled districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhawa. The staggering death rates due to militancy in the regions are hard to fathom in addition to social and economic damages particularly when it comes to FATA and KP. The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan at the end of year 2014 occurred without the complete defeat of Afghan Taliban and this encouraged Pakistani Taliban that in similar manner they can challenge the writ of Pakistani Government. In the current scenario Pakistan has to effectively deal with the local militants and has to wisely counter the blame game emanating from the Afghan Government for the stability in FATA and KP. If Afghanistan after the US withdrawal like Iraq became the battle ground of proxy wars it will have serious security threats for Pakistan and the major effects will be seen in FATA and KP.

Key words: US withdrawal, militancy, FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhawa, security threats,

The US led invasion of Afghanistan after the incidence of 9/11 opened new debate vis-a- vis tracing the roots and strategies of nabbing terrorism in this region. The use of military force was considered essential to demolish the evil forces known to the world by the name of Al-Qaeda and thereof the 'War on Terror' became the flashpoint of the Twenty first century. The invasion impressed upon countries to change their foreign policy in the best interest of global peace by fighting the 'War on Terror'. Pakistan being the most important neighbor of Afghanistan had no other choice but to fight the war against the forces of terror. The ghost of militancy started to haunt Pakistan when it abandoned the former allies i.e. Taliban in Afghanistan. There is no denial of the fact that Pakistan was once a staunch supporter of Taliban regime in Afghanistan prior to the incident of 9/11 and countries like Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkeministan deeply denounced the act of assisting Taliban (Rais, 2004). Pakistan had its own interest in extending support to Taliban movement as it wanted to keep its arch enemy, India at bay who was not only a close ally of Soviet Union but was more focused on taking full control of Indian Ocean, setting its eyes to acquire a permanent seat in the security council, aiming to damage the nuclear program of Pakistan and domination over the entire South Asia and littoral states (Koreshi, 2012). India is still pursuing her goals and it is maximizing threat perception of Pakistan by countering Pakistan's role in Afghanistan.

Commencement of 'Operation enduring Freedom' on October 7, 2001 although effected countries like Iran, Russia and China to a certain degree, their international image was not compromised. But, the case did not hold true for Pakistan because its involvement in Afghan conflict by extending active support to US military action made Pakistan a flashpoint in the world (Rais, 2004). The spillover effects of the war on terror have done havoc in Pakistan. Today Pakistan has more internal challenges than external challenges and all are the byproducts of indulging in Afghan's war and 'War on Terror'. From Karachi to Khyber the whole country is engulfed in the fratricidal blood bath. Musharraf also admitted in his autobiography highlighting the issue and stated:

"The United States was not the only casualty of 9/11. The attacks hit Pakistan differently, but with equally savage force. We feel the ramifications to this day. No other country has faced as many threats on as many fronts." (Musharraf, 2006, p. 222)

The Afghan war is the second longest war of United States after Vietnam War. The withdrawal of the US troops gave a new paradigm shift to the region. The world has witnessed the case of Iraq and is now apprehensive about the future of Afghanistan. It is pertinent to mention here that Islamic State (IS) which emerged in 2014, right three years after US drawdown from Iraq is the outcome of Post-Saddam anarchy. In 2011 President Obama declared with high confidence: "We are leaving behind a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq" (Macreal, 2014). Today the IS has leashed its unbridled atrocities in Iraq, Syria

and Yemen and analysts are acutely aware that countries lying at the eastern boarder of Iraq will face the imminent threat if preemptive measures are not taken.

US has gained nothing in the thirteen years war in Afghanistan, the counter insurgency operations by the US and NATO forces have yielded no positive results for the threat of Taliban has not diminished from the region. According to Mahmud Shah, "The only trophy which it can claim is the elimination of Osama bin Laden. Otherwise, the terrorism which the Americans came to eliminate has increased, not decreased" (Shah, 2013). When the withdrawal of the US and NATO was at the corner stone, the same year 2014 is regarded as the deadliest year after 2001 for more than 3180 civilians were killed, 6430 were injured and there was 33% increase being witnessed in the deadliest battleground (Dominguez, 2014). The rising death toll puts the performance of Afghan National Security forces in question and signifies the drawbacks of 'Resolute Support Mission'. US need not to undermine that professional development of the armed forces could not be achieved in prescribed timeline. Armed forces take years to mature and acquire proficiency let alone for example of Pakistan Infantry's history goes back to 1914.

'Operation Enduring Freedom' might have ended in Afghanistan on December 28, 2014. But the war is yet not over because Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) signed on September 30, 2014 entails the presence of 9800 US military personnel in 2015. In a recent report Mr. Dobbins, US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan from May 2013 to July 2014 and Mr. Malkasian, political adviser to General Joseph Dunford from May 2013 to August 2014 have urged United States to 'seize the moment' by keeping forces in Afghanistan till 2017 and beyond (Dawn, 2015). The presence of foreign boots will certainly have active role in the events that will unfold in future. Modern day Great Game is being played around inner Asia and centers on Afghanistan. Major powers embroiled in competition are China, Russia, India and the United States but Pakistan is also an important player and faced with accelerated blow back especially its border region of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Goodson, 2014).

Afghanistan and Pakistan from Past to Present

Pakistan is geopolitically the most important country of the Asian heartland as Hasan Dani (2008) mentions, "it is not land locked, parched and isolated". It is widely believed that Afghanistan and Pakistan are not only next door neighbors but the connections are deeper for their similarity in history, religion, culture, trade language and ethnic linkages. Despite the similarities between the two countries the relations between them have remained in doldrums over the issue of Durand Line, the idea of greater Pakhtunistan, the soviet invasion, Taliban rise in the region, unending war on terror, India's increasing influence in Afghanistan and currently the peace dialogue with Taliban in the context of US withdrawal from the region are bone of contention and sources of threat to Pakistan.

When Pakistan got independence in 1947 the basic principle of its foreign policy as enunciated by Quaid-e-Azam was "peace at home and peace abroad" (Koreshi, 2012). Therefore the primal objective was to establish friendly relations with Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan was reluctant to accept the newly established state and owing to the complex dynamics of its creation considered it fragile to survive in the long run and set the eyes on its territory. Attempts were made to create obstacles for Pakistan by renouncing the Durand Line and adopted a rigid posture on an Independent Pashtun nation. However, Pakistan marginalized all the claims of Afghanistan (Budihhas, 2011).

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 perplexed Pakistan. The amiable relations between Soviet Union and India were something that Pakistan was not fond of. In order to ward off the danger of Communist Regime, United States extended the helping hand to Pakistan for the expulsion of common enemy from Afghan Territory. Together they raised *Mujahedeen* trained in Pakistan with funding from United States to defeat the Red Army and they achieved the goal (Budihhas, 2011).

Major repercussions Pakistan bore internally of the Soviet War in Afghanistan and saw the increase in cross border drug proliferation and large exodus of Afghan refugees to its land. Refugees were burden on Pakistan economy and led to new demographical and political tensions (Grare, 2003). Till date Pakistan is facing the problem of 2 Million refugees who are reluctant to leave the country. In the post-Soviet era especially after the collapse of the Najibullah Government in 1992 plunged the entire Afghanistan in to a civil war. War lords were not afraid of using heinous acts for gaining power in the country. Chaotic situation in Afghanistan gave emergence to Taliban gaining the control of the country in 1996. Pakistan supported the Taliban regime for its pro Pakistani stance which was missing in the previous stake holders of Afghan political scene. But, the support vanished after the incident of 9/11 as Pakistan relinquished supporting Taliban regime under monumental International pressure.

Fusillade of allegations between Kabul and Islamabad started when Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun leader from Kandahar took charge of Afghan presidential office in December 2001. Afghanistan blamed Pakistan for insurgency in the region while Pakistan reciprocated by making it accomplice of India in fanning the flames of hatred in Balochistan. In the year 2008 from

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attack on Indian embassy to the killing of NATO soldiers Pakistan was held accountable. When Burhanuddin Rabbani, former Afghan president and chief of High Peace Council was assassinated in 2011 there was no deviation from the norm. Similar trend was observed when Afghan Spy Chief was attacked in 2012. The relations between Northern Alliance and Pakistan were marred with trust deficit (Hussain & Latif, 2012). Pakistan in 2012 adopted a “Staregic Shift” in its Afghan policy and focused reconciliation with Northern Alliance as its relation with United states were at impasse over the Salala check post incident, Raymond David case and on the Operation Neptune Spear. Pakistan feared diplomatic isolation and was quick to change its maneuvers. Islamabad is mindful of the fact that insecurity and instability in Afghanistan will have serious implications for its own security and might increase the burden on its counterterrorism efforts. For that reason, Pakistan has been helping the US and the Afghan government in their efforts to reach out to the Afghan Taliban through peace talks. Pakistan was part of the international efforts that finally resulted in the Taliban opening an office in Qatar. At the same time, over the years Islamabad has launched extensive efforts to reach out to non-Pashtun Afghans in an effort to demonstrate that Pakistan’s Afghan policy was no longer exclusively focused on Pashtuns or the Taliban. Pakistan, like other countries in the region, cannot afford the rule of Taliban in Kabul as that would give impetus to Taliban-like movements in Pakistan (Yusuf, 2013).

Mr. Ashraf Ghani who came to power last year September 2014 in Afghanistan wants to establish peace in his country by having a composite dialogue with Afghan Taliban and is interested in Pakistan to play its role effectively. Unlike his predecessor he has pro Pakistan approach and cancelled the arm deal signed by Hamid Karzai in 2011 with India to Pacify Pakistan. Pakistan need to act in a quid pro quo before the president Ghani changes his mind due to the brazen annual summer offensive launched by Afghan Taliban.

Ramifications for FATA and KP

Pakistan has 2640 km long border with Afghanistan. There are almost 300 passes that link Afghanistan with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balouchistan (Hilali, 2005). Since the incidence of 9/11 Pakistan has been considered the sanctuary for the terrorists who escaped from Afghanistan after the US invasion (Ahmed, 2010). One major reason that contributed to the settlement of militants in FATA is the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Javaid, 2011) and the other is *Pashtunwali* (the Pashtun way of life) that governs the behavior of people residing in FATA and KP which allow them to facilitate new comers namely guests (Ahmed, 2010). Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is approximately 27,220 sq km in size and has 600 km porous border with Afghanistan. It comprises of seven tribal agencies namely: Mohmand, Bajaur, Orakzai, Kurram, Khyber, South and North Waziristan and six Frontier Regions (Bannu, FR Dera Ismail Khan, FR Kohat, FR Lakhi, FR Peshawar and FR Tank). It is semi-autonomous region, lying in the North West of Pakistan considered to be tribal hunter land having its own political and social set up.

For people of FATA, War on Terror is a political rather than an ideological problem. They are of the view that Taliban are legitimate fighters against the United States as they perceived American occupation over the Afghanistan as illegal. Majority of the people in FATA considers the US as an *enemy state* and only few in numbers consider them *friend*. They have a staunch belief that it was War on Terror that pushed them to miseries and ruined their peaceful life. Many of them are also of the view that the killing of civilians and security forces in suicide bombing and target killings are *acts of terrorism* (Akbar, 2015).

The porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan prompted the settlement of Afghan Taliban in the Tribal areas of Pakistan and as a result the inhospitable terrain of FATA became the flashpoint of militants where in emerged *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP). These Non State Actors are adamant to destabilize Pakistan. They have carried heinous crimes like assassinations, kidnappings, suicidal attacks and damage to the infrastructure of the country. They have not only killed 400 Maliks of the FATA and Swat Valley but have brutally killed civilians, personals of the military forces and various political and religious leaders (Parveen, khalil, & Shah, 2014). Numerous military operations have been carried out to silence the enemy of Pakistan as it was not possible to brush aside their hostilities through peaceful dialogue. Further, whenever Government of Pakistan initiated a dialogue with TTP it yielded no positive outcomes. Operation *Rah-e-Rast* a massive military operation was launched in Swat Valley on April 26, 2009 against TTP of Swat and their associates .In Bajaur agency operation *Sher- Dil* (Lion Heart) was launched on September 9, 2008 against 2000 militants who were residing in the region. In Orakzai Agency safe havens of militants were dismantled with Aerial Strikes by Pakistan Air force. Operation *Sirat-e- Mustakim* was launched in Bara Tehsil area of Khyber Agency over massive killing of minorities by the militants. In Kurrum agency operation *Koh-i-Sufaid* (White Mountain) was conducted between May 2, 2011 and August 17, 2011 (Parveen, khalil, & Shah, 2014).

On June 24, 2014 operation *Zarb-e- Azab* was launced in North Waziristan, area having history of violence even before the existence of Pakistan. Director General, Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) on the launch of Operation said,

“On the directions of the Government, Armed forces of Pakistan have launched a comprehensive operation against foreign and local terrorists who are hiding in sanctuaries in

North Waziristan Agency..... They had also paralyzed life within the agency and had perpetually terrorized the entire peace loving and patriotic local population.”(The News, 2014)

What militants did in retaliation to operation *Zarb- e-Azab*, was the most callous act never seen before in the history of Pakistan killing 135 students in a military run school in Peshawar leaving the entire nation in anger and grief. The Prime Minister of Pakistan described the incident as a “national tragedy unleashed by savages” (Dawn,2014). Anger and grief filled the atmosphere of Pakistan demanding quick response by the State. Pakistan responded by establishing military courts through 21st Amendment aiming to enforce death penalty to the terrorists. *Zarb-e Azab* attained greater momentum and after its one year of launch 2,763 militants have been killed and over 9000 have surrendered (Shahid, 2015).

Settlement of Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

Whenever fierce fighting breaks out between militants and Security forces, displacement comes as a natural phenomenon. From military operation in Swat to North Waziristan, the region has witnessed displacement of the indigenous people compelling them to take shelters in adjoining areas by living in the camps or with their relatives. According to FATA Disaster Management Authority (FDMA) displaced individuals are 283,463. Detail breakdown of displaced people is documented region wise in Figure1.

Agency	Total Registration	NADRA Verified	Registered Return	Spontaneous Return	Un-Registered Return	Active for Food	Total Balance
Bajaur	86,407	72,895	72,895	0	0	0	0
FR-Tank	2,256	2,228	1,852	0	0	376	376
Khyber	176,396	97,367	36,071	0	15,149	61,296	61,296
Kurram	56,122	47,802	21,937	6,135	2,022	19,730	25,865
Mohmand	48,954	36,759	36,759	0	0	0	0
NWA	129,486	104,002	1,436	0	0	102,566	102,566
Orakzai	48,656	38,275	3,660	8,367	14,114	21,248	29,615
SWA	94,096	71,124	7,379	44	7,455	37,755	63,745
Grand Total	642,373	470,452	186,989	14,546	38,740	242,971	283,463

Source: FATA Disaster Management Authority (www.fdma.gov.pk)

Fig:1 IDPs Statistics

Effective settlement of internally displaced people (IDPS) is a major concern for both Civil and Military Administration. Without winning the hearts of the native people it is difficult to bring peace and stability in the region. Realizing the issue Prime Minister and Chief of Army Staff strongly emphasized on their rehabilitation in apex committee held at KP (Dawn, 2015). People of FATA consider the displacement an attack on their self esteem they have to face various social economic and political problems. According to FATA Research Centre (2013) major challenges being faced by women and children IDPS are loss of identity, lack of shelter, physical health and hygiene problems and food problems. There is a dire need for bringing reforms in FATA because successful repatriation and effective settlement of IDPs cannot be achieved unless there are developmental projects, improved governance and improved law and order situation in the region. There is likelihood that militants will make an attempt to influence the mind of the displaced people through their welfare activities. In this context it is vital for the government to cut the financial resource network of the militants and reach to the minds and hearts of the people before the miscreants galvanize them in their ranks and file.

The Issue of Drone Attacks

Under Obama’s administration drone attacks have particularly increased relative to Bush Administration with the introduction of *signature strikes*. In 2013 President Obama regulated the rules for Drone Attacks relying on more intelligence information to decrease the civilian casualties but exempted Pakistan from any such measure declaring “proposed targets are imminent threats to the US”(Entous, 2015). In this backdrop after the Withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan there will be sufficient rise in the drone attacks. Examining the statistics shown in figure 2, it is evident that there might be hiatus in drone attacks for some time but US will not abandon the predator when it comes to terrorists hideouts in FATA and KP.

Year	Incidents	Killed	Injured
2005	1	1	0
2006	0	0	0
2007	1	20	15
2008	19	156	17
2009	46	536	75
2010	90	831	85+
2011	59	548	52
2012	46	344	37
2013	24	158	29
2014	19	122	26
2015	9	58	11
Total	314	2774	347+

Source: South Asian Terrorism Portal (SATP)

Fig:2 Drone attack in Pakistan: 2005-2015

The drone attack dilemma would not be resolved easily because of the mixed reviews within Pakistan. One school of thought believes that they are effective in curbing the militancy from the region as in the rugged terrain it is not possible to win the war without using these predators. While the other school of thought believes that the strikes are unlawful on the ground that they are extrajudicial killings and the casualty rate of the civilians are high than the militants. Although TTP leaders like Baitullah Mehsud, Hakim Ullah Mehsud and more recently Khawaray Mehsud had been killed in drone attacks but there is no denial that civilians death rate is high compared to the militants as Maan, (2014) stated "unilateral use of drones in FATA has led to significant collateral damage, apart from killing a few HVTs." Given overall environment in FATA drone strikes are lie double edge sword it has the potential to enhance anti-American sentiment and proliferate violence in the coming years.

Consortium of Militants

The ongoing military operation *Zarb -e- Azab* has dismantled TTP residing in North Waziristan to certain degree. Most of the militants went to Kunar, Afghanistan to avoid the wrath of the Pakistani security forces. Victory against militancy cannot be claimed until the entire state get rid of militancy particularly FATA and KP. Today in Pakistan various militants outfits are present namely Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, Jamaat ul Ahrar, Lashkar-i-Khorasan, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat, Jamaat ud Dawa, the State clearly needs to ban these militants outfits by taking stringent measures against them because a high probability of collusion between Afghanistan and Pakistan militants after the US withdrawal is highly possible. The weak ANSF if allowed Afghanistan to become once again the conduit of proxy wars in such case Pakistani militants will remerge with different names and with different allies within the country and on the Pak-Afghan border region. The emergence will pose serious threat to the stability of FATA and KP because the cross borders attacks would increase destabilizing the entire region. The new wave of insurgency will turn FATA and KP into ashes, for the militants will only seek revenge from the Government and military of Pakistan. It is imperative now for law enforcement agencies to be ahead of militants in their strategies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Stability in Afghanistan can be achieved after the US withdrawal only if the countries in the region play their role positively in the war torn country. A stable Afghanistan is of paramount importance to Pakistan because without it stability in FATA and KP is a distant cry. Pakistan needs to overcome its internal challenges from militancy in FATA and KP curbing insurgency in Baluchistan, without solving them Pakistan Army will be occupied with Western Border ignoring the Eastern border where the threat is still present. The issue of IDPs and Drone attacks if not addressed properly will make the displaced individuals vulnerable to the diabolic plans of the militants who may use them against Pakistan posing serious threat to the writ of the state. Further, the absence of developmental projects in FATA and KP leads to abject poverty which will remain the hallmark of the region unless the internal strife is not resolved and the governance is not improved.

Following recommendations can be taken into consideration:

- **Diplomacy:** Pakistan needs to play the rules of diplomacy in a dignified manner. Any faux pas would leave the country in a lurch. President like Ashraf Ghani would be hard to find in Afghanistan having pro Pakistani stance, in case Pakistan does not meet his expectations consequently a strong Kabul-Delhi Nexus will emerge. Therefore, Pakistan needs to play the role in the region effectively.
- **Reforms in FCR:** It is time to bring positive changes in FCR. People of FATA like other citizens of Pakistan need to be protected under the constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan. If the sense of belongingness is missing among the people of FATA and they feel disgruntled and their honor is not redeemed then no matter what effective measures are adopted by the State they would not generate any positive results.

- **Concreted Efforts:** Militancy cannot be eradicated from FATA and KP unless the military and civil government is on the same page. With concerted efforts of the concerned quarters like removing the distinction between good and bad Taliban the deteriorating situation of the country could only then be improved.
- **Breaking the Nexus:** The nexus between TTP and Al-Qaeda and now Islamic State (IS), if the regions have to be freed from the tyranny of these militants. By cutting the financial arteries through intelligence sharing and joint ventures these groups could be dismantled and defeated. Delaying of measures against these groups will allow their expansion, growth and unity which will turn the world a horrible place to live in.

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