Insurgency, Reforms, Merger and the Third Era of Development in Erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan

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Abstract

This study mainly focus on the critical situation emerged with militancy and the resistance made from both sides of the border and later leading towards major military operations in the entire region i.e. FATA. The only spot that is left for the government think-tankers to retain their writ and status-quo by infusing the stability in order to bring major reforms and merge FATA with the settled areas of the country. The older development agenda for FATA was badly failed promoting lawlessness in a self-governed environment and leaving the traditional know-how of the FATA tribes aside. The tribal people consider their traits and cultural behaviors as part of their social system existing in a social environment. This paper presented a way forward for the upcoming development agenda.

Key words: Planning, Militancy, Development, Merger, Reforms.

Introduction:

Militancy left remarkable scars on the surface the most hospital and friendly - with every ethnicity of the world- environment of FATA. The Pakhtoon tribes, their cultural and religious attachments presented a very negative image to the western world forcing the Pakistani Government on military action against the foreigners and local extremist element in the region. The strategic thinkers, policy makers and development specialists were also gathered to rethink wisely this time that what they missed in the past which led the entire region into such clutter. This study presented some key points after a detail discussion with previous development specialist and project professionals who incorporated their expertise for decades in the tribal region. The researcher highlighted major flaws that were made in the development projects of various sectors with the help of detail discussions with former and existing employees of FATA.

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Objectives of the Study

- to explore the older and later problems associated with merger and reforms keeping in mind the previous development agenda of 2 different eras.
- to study certain reviews and researches to investigate evolving practices regarding the development agenda and to understand their interpretation, considering contemporary intellectual debates.
- to highlight the development process by identifying challenges and dealing these challenges by exploring multiple opportunities presented during the devolution process.
- to provide a proposals for development process improvements and further implementation.

Literature Review

Before independence, the Pakhtoon tribes of FATA confronted rigorously whenever the royals tried to overcome and encroach the territorial control of the tribal people or to enhance their control by encroaching on tribal territory, or attempted to hinder the tribal regional affairs. Consequently, the British administration convinced the royals to offer the tribal people a generous deal regarding their autonomy for managing their regional affairs (Rubin & Siddique, 2006, pp. 4-5).

After the independence in 1947, Pakistani Government adopted the limited administrative style left by the British royals to run the country. Accordingly the Government of Pakistan also acknowledged the tribal region’s semiautonomous status and further assuring the tribal people about the continuation of the allowances and subsidies that were set by the British Royals (Naseemullah, 2014; Rubin & Siddique, 2006). It was considered as the most basic reason by some researchers, with the assumption of different tribes that were not willing the state’s involvement in their traditional environment. According to Khan (1972) the state had a huge shortage of professional and technical staff in the beginning and it was difficult for a newly emerged state to enhance its representation acquiring a balanced position by initiating socio economic development policies for the entire region immediately. He further added that at the time of independence the entire region was stuck in many problems having very limited resources to be provided for development activities in the tribal areas.

Different successive political and military governments in past seven decades maintained the regional autonomy of the tribal Paskhtoons in order to gain the keep tribal clans calm due to the hostile approach of Afghanistan towards Pakistan. Such an approach led towards a neighboring country ruined the foreign policy of Pakistan and whenever
there is an attempt by the government to control the local autonomy of the tribal people always gave an edge to Afghanistan to raise the tribal people against Pakistan. The lack of involvement in the tribal region by the Pakistani government kept these tribal Pkhtoons to live their own lifestyle under the self governed scenario across FATA (A. S. Ahmed, 1991).

Many of the socialists and anthropologists have highlighted various characteristics of the Pakhtoon tribes where they tend to FATA as a strong example. In each tribal agency the term ‘Pakhtoonwali’ is referred to tribal privileges among local Pakhtoons of certain regions and accordingly, ‘Pakhtoonwali’ term has set some parameters for their own cultures and norms and they know how defend them (A. Ahmed, 1980). At a glance, the start of 2018 twisted the countries overall politics to a boiling point. The insurgency and unstable situation across FATA intimidated much of the modern practitioners and scholars for debates and dragged the strategic thinkers for major reforms in the region. FATA, mostly homogenous and predominantly homogeneous region consisted of various kindred Pakhtoon clans occupying almost similar traditions, social traits and cultures. Generally, the research work of Rubin and Siddique (2006, pp. 4-5), Neumann (2007), Nawaz (2009), Johnson and Mason (2008) and many other anthropologist regarded Pakhtoons as one of the largest ethnic groups around the world making an estimated figure of 32-35 millions (almost 15-16% of the whole population according to census 2017) in Pakistan and across the border around 20 millions (almost 42-60% of the whole population) located in Afghanistan.

The development scenario across FATA has crossed the limits of its complexity in the past few decades. Cultural and traditionally known environments have strengthened the ropes of ‘self-governance mode’ of controlling the local communities and tribal traditions, reluctantly promoting lawlessness across tribal belt.

Tribal people have faced multifarious judgments from local as well federal government and other international donor agencies for their regional socio-economic development since 1970. The 9/11 aftermath dragged Pakistan into a messy situation and the phenomena of terrorism and extremism pushed the entire tribal region in a pool of blind fish. Pakistan was pressurized internationally to take necessary actions against the extremist elements which disturbed the developmental process across the conflict ridden zone. A call of “lawlessness” was raised against the traditional ancestral autonomy of tribal “Maliks” which stood as a key barrier in the way of development and consequentially the regional militancy changed the developmental cases of FATA and cannot be
transformed overnight (Markey, 2008). The same report by Markey 
(2008) communicates and suggests economic and regional development 
empowerment on urgency basis that can easily overcome the insurgency 
created in the region by militancy and other extremist activities.

The unfolding development about FATA was initiated in 2002 
having a speedy start with highlighting developmental planning through 
targeting deficiencies in development that existed in the last five decades 
of the poor colonial administrative system across FATA. This second era 
of development was initiated after the failure of the first era that was 
commenced at the end of the famous Indo-Pak war. The disappointments 
in the development projects of the defunct FATA-DC (1970-2002) for 
almost 3 decades left some remarkable scars on the expertise and 
proficiencies of the development specialists. Following this approach the 
establishment of FATA Secretariat took place in the same year and 
FATA Development Authority subsequently in 2006. The drapes from 
government’s a ten year mega plan were removed by a foreign funded 
project called “medium term development plan” through allocating 2 
billion USD lately called Sustainable Development Plan (SDP, 2006-
2015) financially supported by international development agencies and 
their strong technical assistance. The multi-featured actors specialized 
for development consisted of DFID, USAID and IUNC alongwith other 
local NGOs were the partners for a latest ‘way forward’ for development 
in FATA which was surrounded by an optimism of equal development in 
the region (FATA, 2006, p. 10 (X); Talbot, 2009). The plan suffered 
heavily due to the poor political intervention and the insurgency occurred 
during the last 2 decades declaring FATA as a conflict ridden zone of the 
entire country.

The planners that were involved in the so called mega plan for 
the lost development in the region were well aware of the previous 
failures regarding development in FATA. Their claim of awareness was 
stimulated by the previous misconceived ideas of already proposed 
development, encouraging the implementation of an aggressive 
development agenda in the adversity of FATA. The SDP was winded-up 
with a new plan of Accelerated Development Strategy (ADS, 2016-2025) 
whereas the deficiencies of SDP clearly portray that the traditional 
politics and the complex environment of FATA failed the public policy 
makers and consequentially affecting the overall development.

The survey report of ADB (2002, pp. 1-2) on FATA and 
majority of other researchers and professional experts declared this 
conflict ridden zone as the most underdeveloped and the lag behind area 
of Pakistan since independence. The government of Pakistan established 
various public sector bodies and organizations for the development and
expansion of FATA such as the dissolved FATA-DC, FATA Secretariat, FATA-DA, FDMA, FATA-EF etc. All of these organizations worked for the development and betterment of already suffered and the conflict hit zones of FATA till the merger and major bureaucratic reforms of 2018.

Research question
How the current government will overcome the existing issues and problems that are associated with the development, merger and reforms in FATA?

Methodology
The main purpose of this study is to answer the question and to find out the key ingredients that lead to a successful compilation of the FATA merger and reforms. Being qualitative in nature, this study was conducted in the social and cultural environment of FATA that explored various opinions of the tribal Malik and employees from different sectors i.e. Minerals, Industries, Small Dams and Irrigation Schemes through in-depth interviews who are working in FATA. The population for this study was the tribal Malik of FATA and also the employees of different public sector organizations that are working in FATA. The major input of this research was made by the former employees of the defunct FATA-DC who are currently working on contractual basis in FATA-DA. They were interviewed accordingly and their suggestions were compared with previous development eras and the final way forward for the new merger and development agenda was developed accordingly.

Ethical Consideration and Limitations of the study
All the respondents were well informed about the purpose of the study, research problem and other related ambiguities of the data collection process in accordance with the ethical considerations that are listed in American Psychological Association (APA). They were also given assurance of their secrecy that the information they share will be kept secret and will be only used for research purposes. During this study, being exploratory in nature, the researcher faced numerous problems including the worst law and order situation across FATA. Some problems encountered during field work need to be highlighted here. This research could not access some parts of FATA as unfortunately the timing of the fieldwork coincided with the worst spate of violence in Pakistan and FATA. Potential sites in the more remote parts of FATA were not accessible at all. Second, an extended stay was not possible anywhere in FATA for valid security reasons. Personal
observation at a site over an extended period of time was simply out of
the question under the prevailing circumstances.

**Analysis of the Study**

Keeping in mind the main research objectives, the data gathered through
in-depth interviews from local officers/officials and with the help of
e-mail correspondence from far-flung and remote areas of the tribal
region was further manually analyzed using thematic approach. Each
question was asked from respondents and they answered according to
their role and profession.

Questions concerning interviews from different respondents of
public and private sectors are deeply associated with the development
and merger process across FATA. These questions purely targeted the
core dilemma of the development after the devolution of FATA with a
strong support from review of the past seven decade development,
organizational restructuring and administrative as well as bureaucratic
reforms in FATA.

**Sectoral investigation of various development projects across FATA**

The tribal belt spreads over an area of about 27,220 sq. km. out of which
preliminary geological survey of about 85% has been completed.
Geological investigation in FATA revealed the presence of various types
of sedimentary, igneous and different grades of metaphoric rocks.
Respondents including the ex-employees of Minerals sector from defunct
FATA-DC and merged FATA-DA discussed about the previous
geological studies which indicates the presence of 21 different minerals
out of which 12 minerals have been explored in detail. This mineral
potential can be utilized for sustainable socio economic development of
local tribal people in particular and the whole country in general.

They further discussed that in order to further enhance the
mineral potential of FATA, the FATA-DA has initiated a number of
mineral exploration infrastructure development and private sector
facilitation projects, which on successful completion will provide sound
basis for planning mineral sector activities on scientific lines. Minerals
exploration and development activities along with construction of access
roads in mineral bearing areas of FATA and provision mine safety
equipments to the miners were kept continued through the ongoing
mineral sector projects. Minerals like copper, coal, manganese, nephrite
and soapstone were explored. Many other projects are initiated for
mineral exploration and development in mineral rich areas.

Similarly, respondents from industries sector briefly explained
the scenario of the establishment of industrial zones across FATA that
huge losses were made by the previous governments in this sector due to the lack of professional planners and strategic developers. Dragging investors from outside FATA developed an aggressive approach in tribal people towards these investors where the tribal people clearly noticed that the key benefits of the industries across FATA are gathered by the outsiders while the local people are left only for labor work.

During an interview from a former employee of the defunct FATA-DC, he explained that the decision regarding setting up the industrial units was discussed with the higher authorities of the country and was very much appreciated. The bad thing that happened was the unqualified management staff who had to show something practically done in this particular area very early so they took hard and fast decision to impress them with very weak ground realities and measures under pressure. Feasibility surveys were done so quickly with a minimum reality and consistent information from the field till end of the study. Furthermore he said that if we consider all these projects with such feeble and unrealistic studies then no project would be able to fulfill the requirements and general principals of the planning process.

Later, the major technical errors became evident during feasibility studies conducted by different investors and private firms when their industrial units got involved in manufacturing. For example, comparing the disadvantages pertaining to the geological situation of FATA with settled areas of the north-western region, primarily the investors had to rely on raw materials available locally to the manufacturers. And the feasibility surveys had also considered it as the basic facto for industrial units across FATA. While, truly saying that almost all of the industrial units relied on the raw material being supplied from outside the tribal region which increased the manufacturing cost to a maximum level.

According to the respondents, Small Dams and Irrigation Sectors were also badly suffered due to the incompetent and incapable staff that did not even know the proper feasibility surveys conducted by the external agencies. The main reason behind the slow progress in these schemes was that no body cared about the tribal region and every corrupt professional just thought that these are remote areas and no body can access it. So they did not feel any fear of the monitoring and audit of these projects and if somehow the audit or monitoring visits were done then the investigation and audit teams were bribed on project site. Every corrupt representative of the government easily transferred himself to any organization of FATA by giving huge amounts of money to the high ups.
Each respondent from the concerned sector explained that the people of FATA suffered enough due to the extremist elements in the region and further military operations also left scars on their lives. The traditional and cultural environment of FATA always restrained the regional dignity and pride of the tribal people.

Planning for these projects was totally flawed from base with huge gaps, whereas, the feasibility studies were conducted on a fake documented data and presented as well as the institutional constraints or social environment of the Pakhtoon culture across FATA was entirely neglected. The tribal people consider these traits and cultural behaviors as part of their social system existing in a social environment. The same social system has also been referred by Pastner and Flam (1982) considering these constraints as intrinsically developed for tribal Pakhtoon society. Furthermore, they discussed the embarrassing scenario from Planning Commission’s side that during the planning process of different projects across FATA, the lack of professional anthropologist as well as a qualified sociologist led the economist to messed-up situation in social context (A. Ahmed, 1982, pp. 41-48). Actually, the government adopted the planning process in each project as a general requirement of the project to show a speedy work and faster results to the higher authorities.

Similarly, the major issue of the tribal society which made a huge gap during feasibility surveys was the social structure and cultural traditions of the tribal Pakhtoon environment which they received inherently. The feasibility studies carried out for development projects in the past missed the inclusion of the cultural traditions and norms of the FATA tribes which clearly conveyed a strong message for the present development specialists and policy makers. Those projects badly failed and the people of FATA suffered enough losing their wealth and specifically hopes from the government and other development agencies.

Pakhtoon culture, their social identity as well as their regional rights are crystal clear from centuries and the above discussions support its manifestation. A. Ahmed (2012) described Pakhtoons in a distinctive manner that they regard their selves as patrons or masters instead of clients in their territorial boundaries. Furthermore he said that their anger can be easily awoken through any move directly or indirectly to fluctuate their identity, specifically those who does not belong to their tribe. During interviews it was also pointed out that the tribal Pakhtoons were well aware of the situation of all the projects initiated in their territory that these are only for their benefits but hopelessly all the projects feasibility studies were done betraying both of their tribal status as well as the state-tribe association and its nature. As it was evident from the
tribal region status that they will be the main beneficiaries of all these projects but the ‘public-private’ partnership scenario were missing in these processes.

**Conclusion**

The people of FATA deserve a better chance to be on a positive scale of development in the upcoming third era of development. The previous development agendas and multi-billion US dollars strategy for regional development dragged the people of FATA to the theatre of militancy and the resistance from both the government and tribal sides made the situation worse. The major flaw that the professional planners and development specialist did not keep in mind during planning process of different development projects was the ideological differences of the tribal regions. Taking just one example from industries sector where the project planners thought that the unavailability of local investors with huge capital is an opportunity for outsiders to invest in the tribal region but they did not realize about the tribal agencies that were not feasible for outsider investors. The lack of development professionals and social anthropologists led development projects to failure. The unfeasible survey reports regarding the tribal ethnicity, their traditions and their own norms were considered less important caused huge loss to the regional development. The current government should think twice about considering the consent of the tribal people before making any solid steps for reforms, merger and further failed development.

**References**


Insurgency, Reforms, Merger…

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