

## **Deradicalization in ex-FATA: Prospects and Challenges**

### **An Assessment of Afghan Factor**

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#### **Abstract**

*Peace and development of Pakistan is closely associated with peace in former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (ex-FATA). The region is in the grip of militancy and extremism since 2001. Ex-FATA lies at the border with Afghanistan which is also a victim to militancy and lawlessness since 1979. The unstable political and geographical conditions of Afghanistan provided safe havens to Tehrik-i-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP) which carries out attacks in ex-FATA. The prolonged militancy in Afghanistan poses security challenges for Pakistan. This paper is aimed at scrutinizing these Afghan-related challenges as well as prospects of peace in detail.*

**Keywords:** ` challenges-FATA, security, Taliban, Afghanistan

#### **Introduction**

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas have been suffering from militancy and extremism since long. The whole region is in the grip of extremism and radicalism and as a result, the people of the area are suffering. Thousands of peoples have been perished and caused to suffer material losses. This wave of radicalization and extremism affects the life of the people, and they are suffering economically, politically and culturally. There are many ways and means to get rid of this ugly state of affairs and transform ex-FATA in to an abode of peace and tranquility. However, there are also some serious challenges to deradicalization process in ex-FATA. These challenges mainly stem from political and geographical conditions in Afghanistan.

#### *Research objectives*

1. To suggests means for lasting peace in ex-FATA
2. To highlight security challenges to ex-FATA

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3. To highlight the illegal cross border movement from Afghanistan to Pakistan.

### **Research Methodology**

The study is based on qualitative research. Primary and secondary data have been used for the research. Security analysts and persons having expert knowledge on the subject have been interviewed.

Secondary data has been collected from security centers, newspapers, research papers and internet sources.

### *Challenges to deradicalization*

There are variety of challenges to deradicalization and peace process in ex -FATA. They have been analyzed as below.

### *Instability in Afghanistan*

Pakistan is facing serious challenges to cope with radicalization and extremism. These challenges are linked with instability in Afghanistan which is partly responsible for extremism and radicalization in ex-FATA. Afghanistan was the theatre of cold war between the former USSR and the British Empire in 19<sup>th</sup> century popularly known as the Great Game between the former USSR and United States. Afghanistan once again became the battle ground between the former USSR and United States in 1979 till the demise of the former. After the incident of September 11, 2001, Afghanistan was stormed by the US led NATO forces. But militancy and instability still persists in this war torn country. Taliban who were defeated by NATO and the US are still fighting for the control of Kabul. Afghanistan is facing militancy and extremism since long and the impacts of these militant conditions on tribal areas of Pakistan is far reaching. Peace in Afghanistan is closely linked with peace and tranquility in ex-FATA. According to Aqeel Yousafzai, “There are many players like Pakistan, India, United States, Russia, Iran and China which are active for achieving their objectives. It causes instability in Afghanistan which has spillover effects on the border areas of Pakistan” (Personal communication, August 13, 2019). Rustam Shah Mohmand observed, “Currently Afghan Taliban have control over 45% of Afghanistan’s territory and they are fighting against the US backed

Afghan government. The situation is not ideal for Pakistan as militancy in Afghanistan affect ex-FATA.” (Personal communication, September 7, 2019).

#### *Indian Role in Afghanistan*

The conflicting interests of Pakistan and India in Afghanistan are another hurdle in bringing durable peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan is very conscious of Indian presence in Afghanistan and feels that India wants to encircle it in Afghanistan. According to Nicholas Howenstein and Sumit Ganguly (2010)“Pakistan has seen India’s rapid insertion of material support to Afghanistan as a strategic loss and as rolling back decades of efforts to establish an alliance between Islamabad and Kabul. This assumed alliance had for years kept India away from Pakistan’s western border but now Pakistan believes that Delhi’s consulates close to the Durand Line serve as center for helping the Baluch militancy. Similarly, Pakistan believes that India wants to minimize the Pakistan influence in Afghanistan to secure its interests there. India also at the same time wants to prevent Pakistan threatening economic, political and strategic interests in Afghanistan. India tries to prevent a revival of Taliban regime in the state. Moreover, India seeks to limit Pakistan’s influence over any future government in Afghanistan and to ensure that no regime formed in Afghanistan that is fundamentally against India” (Howenstein & Ganguly, 2010, Para 17).

Pakistan believes that Indian spy Agency, RAW supports TTP for militant activities in ex-FATA. There are TTP’s safe havens in Afghanistan enjoying the blessing of India which is detrimental to the security of Pakistan. These militants not only carry out attacks inside Pakistan but also attacks Pakistani military check posts in ex-FATA from time to time. Afghanistan is a bone of contention between Pakistan and India. Both Pakistan and India are trying to minimize the influence of each other in Afghanistan. This tug of war in Afghanistan is still continuing and the people of Afghanistan are suffering due to their rivalry. The Indian hold in Afghanistan and especially near Pak- Afghan border areas is a great challenge for Pakistan security management to neutralize (see for example Muhammad & Shah, 2017).

#### *Emergence of ISIS’s threat in Afghanistan*

The advent of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in Afghanistan is a great challenge and a litmus test for Afghan security forces. The effects of the rising of ISIS in Afghanistan are also great for the security of Pakistan. The presence of ISIS in Afghanistan has been a serious threat to the region, after it gained control of areas in the Nangarhar and eastern provinces of Afghanistan. “The province’s important location along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and the group’s readiness to feed demand for narcotics trade grant it strength” (Mahmood, 2015: 1). This militant organization is known for its deadly attacks and its extremists and radical views of the religion throughout the world. ISIS relies on the defection of Afghan Taliban and other militants groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan for recruitment. They can organize different militants of TTP and other militant organizations. “The group will rely heavily on defections from existing insurgent outfits. The danger is that the group has become the most likely vehicle for Taliban militants, disaffected with their own internal struggles or reticent about possible engagement in a peace process, to continue profitable *jihād*” (Mellbin, 2015, Para 9).

The emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan is not only a challenge to peace and stability in Afghanistan but certainly is a potential threat to the efforts of Pakistan security forces to dismantle militants from the tribal areas in Pakistan. According to Rustam Shah Mohmand, “ISIS is active in Afghanistan mainly, in Paktika, Paktia, and Badakhshan and Kunar province. ISIS is not only a security threat to Pakistan but to the region as well” (Personal communication September 7, 2019).

It is a great challenge for the Afghan army to eliminate the fearless fighter of ISIS out of the remote areas of Afghanistan, adjacent to Pakistan border. Others militant organizations like TTP and Al-Qaida may take advantage of this situation and may pose security challenges for Pakistan. Sara Mahmood (2015: 3) observed, “ISIS activities will strain Pak-Afghan relations, leading to an escalation of violence in the territory it controls. However, while the group’s members simply represent a rebranding of militants with limited local followings, the increase in actors, alongside the Afghan Taliban and Pakistani Taliban, will lead to further instability for the country and the region”.

The ISIS has the capacity to induce the youth of Pakistan to recruit them in the name of *Jihad*. Tribal belt can prove a fertile land for its narrative. The ISIS has capability of recruitment with global agenda of *jihad*. It can organize the foreign militants in remote areas in Afghanistan and ex-FATA which will provide a new spirit and energy to the militants of TTP and others organizations. This thing will create more security challenges for Pakistan.

### *Pak-Afghan Border Challenges*

Pak-Afghan border is a long border consists of mountainous regions which makes its effective management very difficult. Traditionally, the border management has not been effective as thousands of Afghans and Pakistanis crossed border without any valid documents. Due to security concerns Pakistan decided to improve effective border management and decided to ban illegal entries to Pakistan in 2016 (the daily Nation, May 31, 2016, Para 1).

In order to check cross border illegal movement, Pakistan decided to fence and fortify it by erecting check posts and 750 forts along the border. "This work is currently under way and expected to be completed in 2019 (the daily Times, February 10, 2018, Para 1). Pakistan's decision to fence the border has many challenges as Afghan government showed its displeasure over this development. Amina Khan (2017: 29) observed, "This initiative even met with strong opposition from Afghan's side, which noted that the line would only lead to dividing and separating the ethnic tribes on both sides of the border."

Though the idea of effective border management is certainly a good one, it is not an easy task to perform. Fencing of the border is itself a mighty challenge. According to Shams Mohmand, a Peshawar based security analyst "The fencing will take time and money. The important challenge in fencing the border is that the border is not accessible at certain points. Fencing the border does not follow a smooth line." (Personal communication, July 24, 2019). According to Rustam Shah Mohmand, "The line is not clear on many points. It may divide the families of a tribe. Currently the people are crossing the border with ease but fencing of the border will increase their problems. Moreover, security will be consistently will be require for monitoring which will increase

the defense budget” (Personal communication, September 7, 2019). According to Thomas Johnson, “The management of this border is an uphill task. Soviets couldn’t do it with 50km along the border. Fencing might help in plains but not in the mountains”. (Personal communication August 30, 2018). Pak-Afghan border has considerable long length and located in inhospitable mountains. It will be a daunting challenge for the security forces to guard and secure every inch of the border because of its unique geography. “There are roughly 200 entry–exit points along the Pakistan–Afghan border and given the difficult terrain, the Pakistan’s army capabilities of manning more than 2200 Km long border also come in to question” (Deshmukh, 2017, Para 8). Moreover, it will also be difficult for the government of Pakistan to provide effective modern tools for surveillance and security purposes as it will cast too much.

Afghanistan considers the Durand Line an issue which needs solution. According to Rahim Ullah Yousafzai, (2018)“Though Pakistan is now fencing the border, which stretches for nearly 2,600 km, this is a challenging, time consuming and costly task due to the harsh mountainous terrain and a lack of cooperation from the Afghan government, which has not formally recognized the Durand Line as an international border” (Para 5).Pakistan must secure the help of Afghan government for border management. Pakistan cannot protect and manage the border unilaterally. Afghan government can create many hurdles for the security forces of Pakistan in securing the border. Arooj Naveed (2017) observed, “Borders strengthen the intrinsic human need for physical protection and the ownership of property. Such protection is meaningless unless the border in question is understood as distinct and separate. Thus, the intuitive taken by Pakistan to secure the Durand Line.... should be seen as a friendly country’s fortification of a currently unfenced border. However, Afghanistan has often appeared an unwilling partner in securing the border...Decision made on bilateral basis will likely produce more benefits than unilateral efforts. Consequently, Pakistan’s current unilateral action to fortify its border may lead to short-term security gains for Pakistan, but without meaningful cooperation with Kabul, Afghanistan may become more hospitable to terrorists in the long term” (Para,1). Rahim Ulla Yousafzai (2018) also believes that, “The army will remain deployed in the strategically located area, which is spread across 27.222 sq. km, for the foreseeable future to deal with

security threats posed by Pakistani militants based across the border in Afghanistan. The Afghan government has not reconciled itself with the idea of ex-FATA's merger after rejecting it on the ground that it was being done in the presence of the Pakistani army troops deployed there and against the will of tribal people (Para 10).

Since the inception of operation *Zarb-i-Azab*, it is believed that Pakistani militants will entrench on the Afghanistan side of the border area and manage to launch attacks inside Pakistan. Muhammad Amir Rana (2017: 49) observed, "At present, most of the Pakistani Taliban leaders are believed to be hiding in Afghanistan. Some in Pakistan believe that Afghanistan is showing a similar sort of inaction against Pakistani Taliban which the former has been showing against Haqqani Taliban sheltered in Pakistani tribal areas. The cross-border incursions into and from Pakistan are not only affecting Pakistani-Afghan relations (both countries blame each other for cross-border terrorism) but also increasing insecurity at the border in absence of their efforts to evolve some border coordination mechanism".

The government will allocate a huge money for border management which will hurt the economic planners of Pakistan. It will be difficult for Pakistan to post a large force on more than 2200 Km border for considerable length of time. According to Tribune, (May 31, 2016), "Pakistan has spent Rs. 297.3 billion on the war on terror and Rs152.9 billion of these amounts has been given to the country's armed forces under 'special allocations over and above normal defense budget for security related expenditure" (Para 1). The economy of Pakistan is not so sound to bear the expenses of security on the border and ex-FATA for a long time. Moreover, after the proposed withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan, Pakistan will be deprived of the US coalition support fund as the US seems to change her policy in near future. (Iqbal, 2018, Para 1). It will create issues for economic managers of Pakistan to spare huge money for border management consistently.

The prevalence of instable conditions in Afghanistan affects the security and stability of Pakistan. This sad state of affairs is due to the porous border where cross border movement is a daunting challenge to be controlled. According to Center for Research and Security Study's

report (2011: 51), “The prevailing instability which has actually jolted the very foundations of the state of Pakistan has been caused by the Pak-Afghan border. Although Pakistan’s nearly 140,000 troops are guarding the border yet the militants and the militancy continue leaking in to the Pakistani region, afflicting heavy damages to the country”.

### *Prospects of Deradicalization*

Pakistan can meet the above mentioned challenges if the following measures are taken.

### *Improving Pak-Afghan Ties*

Pakistan and Afghanistan are neighbors but unfortunately their relations are not friendly since long. There is mistrust and trust deficit between Pak-Afghan relations which needs consideration by the two governments (see for example Muhammad & Shah, 2017). Good relations between the two countries will boost up economic life in ex-FATA as it bordering Afghanistan. Pakistan can also minimize the security threat from Afghan’s soil with the cooperation of Afghan government and security agencies which is at the lowest ebb at the present. According to Hujjatullah Zia,(June 17, 2019) “The two countries have to cement their ties and increase their mutual cooperation, mainly in peace issues. It is self-evident that terrorists are common threat to the two countries jeopardizing the life of both Afghan and Pakistani people. Thus, Kabul and Islamabad have to seek common ground, combat common threat, and increase their mutual cooperation”.

### *Peace in Afghanistan*

Instability in Afghanistan directly impacts peace and security of ex-FATA. Political instability provides sanctuaries to militants from where they carry their militant activities in ex-FATA. A stable and peaceful Afghanistan is a prerequisite for peace in ex-FATA. Pakistan should play its due role in bringing lasting peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan can



utilize its influence on Afghan Taliban and at the same time take the present Afghan government. Pakistan did the right thing in establishing relations with regional powers for durable peace in Afghanistan. Peace in Afghanistan will not only develop economic activities in ex-FATA but will also reduce security threat to ex-FATA from Afghan soil. With the introduction of economic activities in ex-FATA, extremism and militancy will be discouraged in the area. “It will play a crucial role in curbing Talibanization process in ex-FATA” (Muhammad, 2013: 146).

### *Effective Border Management*

Pak-Afghan shares 2250 km long porous border which poses grave security challenges to both the countries. Due to inhospitable nature of the border area, the militants in both the countries can freely infiltrate for carrying out militant activities which is a security threat for Pakistan and a potent driver for extremism and militancy in ex-FATA. The government of Pakistan has realized this factor and now working on fencing the entire Pak-Afghan border. Pakistan army has been working on this project since 2018 and it is hoped that this project will be completed in 2020. It is a good idea for boosting security of the border which will in turn stop the infiltration of militants and will enhance security in ex-FATA.

Pakistan can take some other measures for strengthening security in ex-FATA. The government of Pakistan needs to build watchtowers and small fortresses at the desired places. Modern technology for surveillance of the area should be employed for effective control of the border. Murshed (February 16, 2017) observed, “Securing the border and ensuring the rule of law on both side of the border remain the only solution to the menace of terrorism that has afflicted this region with bloodshed and mayhem. Militant attacks on either side of the border will only cause further instability.

### *Conclusion*

Afghanistan has been suffering from militancy and extremism since 1979 and its spillover effects on ex-FATA are enormous. It has transformed ex-FATA into the abode of extremism and radicalization. Instability in Afghanistan provides an opportunity to TTP and others

militants to continue arm struggle against Pakistan from Afghan's soil. It is an uphill task for Pakistan to tackle all these issues alone due to unique geographical conditions of the area which is best suited to guerrilla warfare. The mentioned situation is also in favor of India which can use the situation for its own benefits to harbor militants who are involved in arm struggle against Pakistan. Indian support to militancy in Pakistan's tribal areas and Baluchistan is an open secret and the revelations of Indian spy, Gulbashaan, who was captured in Baluchistan further strengthened the presumption that India has been using Afghan's soil to destabilize Pakistan.

Afghanistan is the victim of yet another great game between China, Iran, Russia and the US and its impacts on the security of Pakistan are negative. This tug of war is mainly responsible for instability in Afghanistan which produces serious security challenges for Pakistan. Due to instability, the writ of the government of Afghanistan is weak that is why militants are freely moving and nurturing on Pak-Afghan border areas.

Curbing militancy and radicalization in ex-FATA is closely linked with stability in Afghanistan. A stable and prosperous Afghanistan is in favor of Pakistan. It will reduce the chances of militancy and extremism in Pakistan. Pakistan should try to undermine any challenge to its security from the soil of Afghanistan. Political dialogue, consensus and respect for each other's sovereignty are the means for attaining political trust for curbing

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