

From Military Operations to Rehabilitation: A Sociological Perspective of Counter-Terrorism in Pakistan

Farwa Batool* & Hassan F. Virk**

Abstract

US anti-terrorism policies have had a significant impact on Pakistan. Although America introduced the 'otherness' or 'us & them' phenomena between Americans and the Muslim world to Pakistan, the USA's postmodernist theological approach to Counter-Terrorism (CT) is founded on President Bush's fervor for missionary expansion. Both military operations and terrorist attacks, which had serious social and religious ramifications, were detrimental to the target population of CT operations. The goal of this essay is to develop a social discourse on the consequences of CT operations. It covers a wide range of topics, such as the dissolution of tribal cultures, the difference between official and unofficial stories of suicide bombers, and how exposure to modern weapons of war like drone missiles influences worldviews. The major goal of this study is to develop a sociological driven approach of CT. For this study, remote interviews were conducted with current residents of the terrorist-affected areas (Swat, Malakand, Buner, and UpperDir) as well as migrants and students from

*Farwa Batool is a Lecturer at School of Integrated Social Sciences, University of Lahore. Her research areas are Gender, Security studies and Geopolitics. She can be reached at farwa_btl@hotmail.com.

**Hassan F. Virk is a Lecturer at School of Integrated Social Sciences, University of Lahore. His research interests lie in militarization of space, communist geography, parallel conflict resolution, and postcolonial cultural studies.

From Military Operations to Rehabilitation: A Sociological Perspective...

the diaspora. Creating a sociological road map for removing the threat and social effects of terrorism is a secondary goal. In addition to the prior defensive and preventive measures adopted to combat terrorism, it is suggested that NACTA undertake a rehabilitative strategy inspired by modern sociology.

Keywords: Pakistan, Sociological Perspective, Rehabilitation, Counterterrorism, NACTA.

1. Introduction

Most countries in the world joined US in its counterterrorism initiatives following the 9/11 attacks, beginning with the Global War on Terror. Pakistan, which was designated as a frontline ally, suffered greatly as a result of the USA's zeal to combat terrorism in Afghanistan. The diplomatic support to the Taliban regime, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and geostrategic position of Pakistan made it a crucial ally of the US. This relationship had political and social repercussions for Pakistan to deal with for years. This research aims to draw attention to the social and theological ramifications of two forms of violence: first, terrorism, and second, military operations to combat terrorism in conflict areas. This study's main objective is to identify a sociological strategy for Counter Terrorism. Current residents of the terrorist-affected regions (Swat, Malakand, Buner, and Upper Dir) as well as members of the diaspora (migrants and students) were interviewed remotely for this study. Interviews were conducted with twenty volunteers from the impacted regions of Upper Dir, Swat, Buner, and Malakand. A secondary objective is to provide a sociological road map for eliminating the threat and social consequences of terrorism. In addition, it is recommended that NACTA must adopt a rehabilitative strategy in addition to the defensive and preventative steps previously taken to combat terrorism.

1.1. Role of Pakistan in the global War on Terror

After 9/11, the US declared countering terrorism as top priority. To fulfill this objective, the Bush administration changed both domestic

and foreign policies.¹ It outlined stringent requirements for other countries, warning them that failure to cooperate with the US in the fight against terrorism would have dire repercussions. In order to combat international terrorism, dismantle the terrorist group (Al Qaeda), and prevent other nations from aiding such terrorist organizations, the US and its partners built a historically massive coalition.²

US put tremendous pressure on Pakistan to join the fight against terrorism. The US defense secretary Collin Powell called the then-President Musharraf and said, “you are either with us or against us”.³ Considering the history and current conditions, Pakistan did not have many options. On the other hand, Pakistan had to recover from the sanctions the US had imposed after it conducted nuclear weapons tests. Pakistan has participated in the war since its beginning and many of its citizens and security personnel have died as a result of it. Over half a trillion dollars in economic losses and significant infrastructural damage are the results.⁴ Suicide bombings caused the law-and-order situation to worsen even further. As foreign investment decreased, it had a bigger impact on the economy. To combat terrorism in these areas, the military launched operations. As a result, millions of citizens in KP and Federally Administered Tribal Areas regions were

¹ Gary L. and Gregg II, “George W. Bush: Foreign Affairs,” *Miller Center*, July 10, 2017.

² Lawrence D. Freedman and Bob Woodward, “Bush at War,” *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 2 (2003): 152.

³ LaFeber and Walter, “The rise and fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine,” *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 1 (2009): 71-93.

⁴ Khan and Zahid Ali, “Military operations in FATA and PATA,” *Strategic Studies* 31 (2011): 129-146.

displaced.⁵ The terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism efforts had a significant impact on Pakistan's image. Terrorism and counter-terrorism had an impact on the country's political environment, overall economy and sociological landscape, particularly in the military operations areas.

2. Analysis of the War on Terror's Effects on Pakistan

Pakistan was affected by the global war on terror on a political, social, economic, societal, and psychological level. The former FATA, particularly the North and South Waziristan divisions, and the ex-PATA Swat, Buner, and Malakand divisions, that participated in military counter-terrorism operations, were affected.

2.1. Economic Impact of War

According to an interview of Prime Minister of Pakistan in Washington Post, since joining with the US and becoming a frontline ally of the war on terror, the nation has suffered losses of more than \$150 billion. More than \$152 billion was spent by the nation over the roughly 20-year Afghan conflict. He further added that "More than 70,000 Pakistanis have been killed. Though the US provided \$20 billion in aid, the loss to the economy of Pakistan exceeded \$150 billion".⁶ In addition, Pakistan suffered significantly greater losses than only monetary disaster in the shape of human losses. In Pakistan, both foreign investment and tourism dwindled. The Prime Minister concluded that

⁵ Mohsin and Zakia Rubab, "The crisis of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the federally administered tribal areas of Pakistan and their impact on Pashtun women" *Tigah: A Journal of Peace and Development* 3, no. 2 (2013): 92-117.

⁶ "Pakistani leader to the U.S: We're not your 'hired gun' anymore", *the Washington Post*, December 6, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/pakistani-leader-to-the-us-were-not-your-hired-gun-anymore/2018/12/06/e138790c-f8a5-11e8-863c-9e2f864d47e7_story.html.

“After joining the US effort, Pakistan was targeted as a collaborator, leading to terrorism against our country from the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and other groups”.⁷

2.2. Social Impact of War

The war on terrorism had consequences that went beyond human casualties. The entire outlook of society was altered. Every aspect of the citizens' lives in those areas was affected by these developments. Society had to suffer in terms of education, especially women.

2.3. Human Price

According to an Arab news article, 423,000 people died in the war on terror in Afghanistan and Pakistan alone, and the US spent roughly \$2.31 trillion on the two nations. It also had repercussions for Pakistan since it became a frontline ally of the US in the war on terror.⁸ When Pakistan launched counter-terrorism operations, the Taliban crossed the border and terrorist activities multiplied. Major terrorist attacks increased in 2009, including those against the Sri Lankan cricket team, the Manawa Police Training Center in Lahore, and the General Headquarters of the Pakistan Army.⁹ According to data from the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS), 664 people died and more than a thousand were injured in FATA during the same year as a result of 559 attacks.¹⁰ While there were 1137 terrorist incidents in KP, 1438

⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁸ “‘War on terror’ has cost Pakistan more than \$150bn in losses since 9/11, officials say” *ARAB NEWS*, September 12, 2021.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1927131/world>

⁹ Zulfqar and Saman, "An Overview of Pakistan's Security Situation after Operation Zarb-e-Azb" *South Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (2015): 43-58.

¹⁰ “Pakistan Security Report 2008”, *Pak Institute for Peace Studies Pvt Ltd. (PIPS)*, March 19, 2022. <https://www.pakpips.com/article/book/pakistan-security-report-2008>

people were killed as a result. In KP and FATA, 54 local political figures and tribal maliks were assassinated in the same year. According to Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) data, 401 people died in KP and 631 people died in FATA as a consequence of 388 terrorist acts in 2012. The social life of the residents of the targeted districts was severely impacted by these repeated strikes.¹¹ The data indicates that Pakistan had suffered in great numbers regarding human lives in GWoT. The enhanced quantitative frequency of terrorist attacks adversely impacted human lives in the region.

2.4. Impact on Education

Any nation's development and prosperity is greatly influenced by its level of education. These terrorist operations had a significant negative impact on educational institutions. In their terrorist attacks, the extremists specifically targeted schools. In KP and FATA, both boys' and girls' schools were destroyed in an effort to terrorize the local youth. In year 2008, 119 schools were targeted. In 2009, the number rose to 188; in 2010, it dropped to 129; and in 2011, 135 schools in FATA and KP were attacked. In KP and FATA, almost 1000 schools were attacked, the majority of these were girls' schools. Around 401 schools were assaulted in Swat alone between 2010 and 2011. According to KP's education department, militants damaged 758 schools in the province, including 640 in the division of Malakand.¹² By outlawing leisure activities like listening to music and other forms

¹¹ Zulfiqar Ali, "Over 4,000 houses destroyed in Waziristan operation: report", *DAWN*, November 8, 2008. <https://www.dawn.com/news/427451/over-4000-houses-destroyed-in-waziristan-operation-report>

¹² "Taliban Ambush FC Convoy, Foil Burner Deployment," *DAWN*, April 24, 2009. <https://www.dawn.com/news/459586/taliban-ambush-fc-convoy-foil-buner-deployment-2>

of entertainment, the extremist destroyed the indigenous culture in the area.¹³ Therefore, resurgence of terrorist attack disrupted educational institution in the region.

2.5. Impact of Displacement

People were forced to leave the KP and FATA conflict zones as a result of the military operations. According to figures from the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies, the numbers are between 2.7 to 3.5 million.¹⁴ This figure is regarded as the highest in Pakistani history. Due to the unstable security situation in South Waziristan, many fled to metropolitan areas in order to protect their families. The South Waziristan Agency in FATA experienced the most migration. Nearly 428,000 individuals departed their residences. 383,190 people were uprooted from their homes in the Malakand division alone, 400,000 in the Orakzai Agency, and over 100,000 in the Khyber Agency.¹⁵ An estimated 750,000 persons were displaced in the Mohmand and Bajaur regions.¹⁶ Women and children suffered more as a result of the local terrorism and counter-terrorism activity. They experienced both physical and psychological stress.

It was extremely difficult to get the displaced people back to their homes. As a result of anti-terrorism operations in 2009, almost 4000 homes were damaged. Numerous additional structures were

¹³ Iftikhar A. Khan, "Security Forces Advance on Strategic Kamber Bridge," *DAWN*, May 21, 2009. <https://www.dawn.com/news/465936/security-forces-advance-on-strategic-kamber-bridge>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jamshed and Nousheen, "Cost of Pakistan-US relationship after 9/11" *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology* 18, no. 10 (2021): 1101-1110.

¹⁶ Ibid.

similarly demolished in various combat zones. The cost of resettling the displaced individuals was enormous. People were hesitant to return to their houses. The IDPs were also concerned about the impending economic disaster at home. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) issued an appeal for \$680 million at the time to address the disaster.¹⁷ According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), more than 50,000 pregnant women who were among the displaced people were living in terrible conditions in the camps.¹⁸

2.6. Psychological Impact

People living in conflict zones had to deal with both militant attacks and counter-terrorism operations, which resulted in double the amount of bloodshed. This had an immediate psychological effect on them. The residents of PATA and FATA experienced perpetual terror and helplessness, which left them vulnerable to serious psychological problems and, in some cases, mental illnesses. The loss of a loved one or member of the family triggered such symptoms, including anxiety, despair, nightmares, and suicidal thoughts.¹⁹ The majority of the symptoms—fear, stress, and helplessness—were felt by the displaced youngsters. As a result of the widespread school attacks by militants and the murder of their teachers and other family members, many youngsters suffered from melancholy and trauma.²⁰ The majority of those impacted and suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, sadness, terror, and panic were women, making up

¹⁷Khan and Zahid Ali, "Military operations in FATA and PATA" *Strategic Studies* 31 (2011): 129-146.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Army Embarks on Rah-i-Nijat Finally" *DAWN*, October 18, 2009.

60% of the population. Men most frequently experienced depression.²¹ The impact of GWoT has shaken the collective subconscious of the region.

2.7. Effects on the Education of Women

In every area of their lives, notably in education, militancy had the greatest impact on women. The majority of the targeted schools were girls' schools and other such institutions of higher learning. When military operations to quell local militancy began, the situation for women got worse. People from conflict zones were uprooted, which had a significant impact on their educational progress and, in some cases, a permanent obstruction to educational access. As the culture of women's education was already unsupportive, militancy made matters worse and led to the cessation of women's education.

3. Findings

Interviews were carried out in order to comprehend the social dynamics of the conflict area. Most of the participants were male university students from Buner, Swat, Malakand, and Upper Dir who were uprooted and moved to urban regions of Punjab in search of work. Participants were questioned regarding pre- and post-counter-terrorism operations, as well as the social environment in combat zones. The first respondent, a resident of Upper Dir, claims that the Frontier Constabulary (FC) and police were stationed near a location called Binshahi which borders Afghanistan. After crossing the border, the Taliban arrived there, killed the border guards, and played football with their heads. He mentioned that before the presence of the military,

²¹ Ibid., 9.

locals opposed the Taliban. The non-combatants in the region became combatants in this manner. After the counter-terrorism campaign began in 2009, residents were forced to leave the affected areas. Pakistani flags were painted on stores and markets after the operation to represent peace. Various checkpoints were built for security reasons; however, they made it difficult for people to reach. For instance, it was challenging to get to certain locations because security checks took so long, and students frequently arrived late to class.

Another Upper Dir responder said that overall, the civilian community and the army maintained a strong bond and occasionally worked together on initiatives. Since society was already against female education, the situation for women's education did not significantly improve or worsen as a result of the counter-terrorism campaign. Instead, it got worse since the Taliban specifically targeted and destroyed female schools. Due to terrorism and displacement, a significant portion of the female students enrolled in schools faced a break in their education. The majority of women have only completed middle school. A Swati respondent stated that the community has become overly religious, creating a barrier to education for all people. The older residents of the area did not enjoy the critical thinking skills that the young people with higher education gained. The society's rate of progress fell ten years behind. A male Swat respondent stated that when the Taliban first entered Swat, they pleaded with the public for financial support for the holy war. People gave them financial assistance, while women gave them jewellery and other items. They quickly turned on them, though, and began murdering the locals. An attack on a record store and a TV market (Dozakh Market) marked the beginning of the bombings in Swat. The Taliban murdered police

officers between 2009 to 2011, chopped off their heads, and then hung their bodies in the Green Chowk in Mingora. To spread fear, they used to videotape the executions and distribute the recordings to the general public.

According to a male respondent from Buner, residents of that city resisted the Taliban and established the Aman committee (near Peer-baba) and also engaged in combat. However, when the army arrived, they were forced to evict residents in order to carry out the counterterrorism operation. The majority of what was left behind was destroyed during the operations, so people left the region with their valuable possessions. In areas where the infrastructure was weak, the battle further devastated it. The businesses of people were severely impacted. The battle had a significant negative impact on Buner's marble industry. When the owners of homes returned, they were given compensation funds, however, the sum was small compared to the property's actual cost. Following the military operation, the Pakistani flag was painted on businesses to represent peace, and restoration efforts got underway. Every day edibles were provided to the IDPs, along with other home goods. It was also reported that blankets would be delivered. However, the help was handled improperly, failing to reach the IDPs, and the aid materials later turned up in illegal market.

According to a reply, the area's high level of militancy has had a negative impact on women's education in Swat. There was an outright restriction on girls attending school in Swat. Cultural restrictions made it impossible for women to receive an education there, and the Malala Yousufzai event made matters worse by instilling fear in the community. Women faced difficulties such as removing their veils at checkpoints for security purposes. Due to the traditional ethos of the

region, this practice gave rise to feelings of animosity among the people.

4. Recommendations

The following are a few strategies for further rehabilitating society.

4.1. Rebuilding Society Initiatives

The society in the battle zones underwent a complete change as a result of the war. Cultural limitations on women's property rights, economic opportunities, and freedom of movement already existed before the Taliban-controlled areas. Under the Taliban's rule, things got worse. However, following the anti-terrorist operations, the government concentrated on rehabilitating the affected areas. The infrastructure has been completely built. The sites have been carefully targeted for beautification in order to draw tourists and encourage local tourism. However, people need their initiatives back for the restoration of society. It entails not only assisting the locals with their economic but also with social programs aimed at re-establishing the community that has suffered years of conflicts.

4.2. Women Empowerment

In general, women are denied access to political, economic, and higher education opportunities. Traditionally, because the institutions are outside of their villages, most girls' families and elders do not permit them to continue their education after middle school. It is important to support social initiatives that help women learn and develop their skills through online learning opportunities. So, through such skill-building initiatives, women can work and earn.

4.3. De-Radicalization Campaigns

Six de-radicalization initiatives are already underway in Pakistan, but they lack adequate funding.²² For people who joined forces with the Taliban in the districts that were militarily cleared of Taliban rule, such people pose a constant threat because they are seeking retribution for the deaths of their loved ones. Instead of cutting individuals out and making them feel deprived, the de-radicalization efforts should adhere to the notion of inclusion. Jirga elders and local religious scholars should be encouraged to dispel the myth that religion condones violence and terrorism.²³

4.4. Educational Initiatives

Given the amount of time and years lost in the battle, educating society is crucial because it is trailing behind in comparison to other parts of the country, (particularly behind the curve in terms of awareness and education are the rural communities). They are further hindered from breaking free from the chains of ignorance by cultural constraints. Therefore, educational programs should not only focus on educating kids but also on educating people who missed school because of conflict and displacement. The emphasis should be on developing skills, such as those needed to manage small companies, so that participants may support their families and themselves.

²² Husnul Amin, "Moderate Salafism and the Challenge of De-Radicalization: The Case of Pakistan" *Romanian Journal of Political Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2017): 62-90.

²³ Ahmed, Zahid Shahab, and Farooq Yousaf, "Pashtun Jirgas, their potential in Pak-Afghan reconciliation and national reconstruction" *South Asia Research* 38, no. 1 (2018): 57-74.

5. Conclusion

The traditional tribal values and culture of the civilian population in the conflict zones were threatened by the counter-terrorism operations, despite the fact that they were unavoidable. In federally administered tribal areas and provincially administered tribal areas, the social, political and economic structure has become unstable as a result of these operations. People had to be relocated owing to the military action, and many people complained about having to leave and to lose their homes and belongings as a result. Many local farmers were forced to abandon their herds of animals. Numerous students both male and female whose schools were damaged by the militants lost access to their fundamental right to an education and were traumatized by the violence they witnessed. The socio-psychological fabric of society was severely disrupted as a result of the brutality experienced by the residents of those locations. As a result, the general climate of society has become strained. Although, the entire area suffered severe psychological effects, but the residents of the combat zone suffered in particular. Resultantly, Pakistan suffered severe implications for its economy and security in addition to paying a high price in terms of human casualties. The country witnessed a decline in foreign investment and tourism due to image perception. Many people lost their means of support and their jobs, and the nation also experienced a reduction in foreign investment, infrastructure degradation, capital flight, declining growth rates, low revenue, and general economic system deterioration. In addition to everything else, thousands of military and civilian lives were lost during militancy and counter-attacks. Terrorism ruptured the organic flow of the local society which in return impacted all walks of the life.