Making Peace with Pakistani Taliban to Isolate Al-Qaeda: Successes and Failures

Rohan Gunaratna and Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari

I. INTRODUCTION

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan has become the epicentre of international terrorism in recent years. Located along the 2,400 km long rugged border separating Afghanistan and Pakistan, FATA has provided Al-Qaeda, the most hunted terrorist group in the world, with a robust and resilient sanctuary. According to the US Department of State’s Country Reports on Terrorism 2007 released on 30 April 2008, FATA has provided Al-Qaeda’s leadership with “greater mobility and ability to conduct training and operation planning, particularly that targeting Western Europe and the United States.”

Similarly, the EUROPOL’s Annual “Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2008” released on 28 April 2008 describes FATA as the “command and control centre” for Al-Qaeda’s “remaining core leadership” planning attacks in the EU. According to the report, the foiled plot in Germany, related to Islamic Jihad Union based in the tribal areas and recent cases in UK and Denmark...

* Dr. Rohan K. Gunaratna is the Head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The author of “Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror”, Gunaratna has debriefed high value detainees, including some in Iraq.

Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari is an Associate Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The author is a resident of Peshawar, North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan and specialises in local and foreign militant groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The author has conducted field research in Pakistan and Afghanistan as well. He can be reached on isadnan@ntu.edu.sg.

indicated an increasingly assertive and efficient Pakistani-based command and control of terrorism in EU. The report says that the Afghan Taliban and pro-Taliban groups in Pakistan have links to the increasingly active core-structure of Al-Qaeda. The report further said that while terrorist links between Pakistan and the EU were almost exclusively focused on the UK, they have recently been expanded to the rest of the EU as well.2

The FATA region assumed international significance following the arrival of Afghan Taliban and foreign militants linked to Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations after the US-led coalition attack on Afghanistan. Under pressure from the United States, Pakistani military incursions into FATA to hunt the retreating Al-Qaeda leaders and members in 2002-2003 had unintended consequences. The overwhelming kinetic approach adopted by the Pakistani forces mobilized existing militant groups in FATA and Pakistan and spawned new Pakistani groups dedicated to protecting the foreign fighters. To prevent a popular backlash from Pakistani people in general and tribes in FATA in particular, and to dissociate foreign militants from the local Pakistani militant groups, the Pakistani government signed a series of peace agreements with Pakistani Taliban groups in South and North Waziristan Agencies.

Did these peace agreements benefit Al-Qaeda, Afghan Taliban and Pakistani Taliban groups? With the ease on restriction on the mobility of Pakistani Taliban following the withdrawal of Pakistani security forces in the post-peace deals, has the strength and influence of Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda grown? Has sustained and prolonged propaganda politicised and radicalised a segment of the FATA population into believing that the foreign groups including Al-Qaeda are waging a jihad to defend Islam and Muslims? This paper will analyse the peace agreements signed by the Pakistani government with the Tribes and militants in South and North Waziristan Agencies between 2004 and 2006. It will also discuss the post-peace agreement situation arising in the Waziristan Agencies and its impact on the security of Pakistan.

II. BACKGROUND

FATA is located in the north-west of Pakistan along the border with Afghanistan, and is spread over an area of 27,220 square kilometres. It comprises of seven agencies — Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North and South Waziristan. The FATA region has remained autonomous since Pakistan’s inception in August 1947, and is governed by the British-era archaic administrative system based on the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR).

The entire FATA region is ruled through an indirect system that involves the tribal elders playing a dominant role. Similarly, the law and order is governed by local tribal forces known as khasadars (tribal police) and levies as well as civil armed forces — Frontier Corps and Frontier Constabulary — that fall under the Ministry of Interior.

After Al-Qaeda was dislodged from Tora Bora in Afghanistan in late 2001-early 2002, the terrorist militant organisation retreated to FATA. After relocating to Waziristan, both Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban linked up with the Pakistan Taliban and other Pakistani groups. There was no other way for these two entities to survive in the post 9/11 period than to accept the traditional hospitality of the local tribes under the local tribal code “Pashtunwali.” Subsequently, Al-Qaeda co-opted local tribal militants in South Waziristan Agency, who later became the Pakistani Taliban.\(^3\) Thereafter Al-Qaeda used its tribal affiliations as well as nurtured and built a clerical support base. For instance, after Al-Qaeda’s deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahiri moved to Waziristan and stayed there during a part of 2002, he eventually moved to Bajaur Agency. As his wife and two children were killed during US attacks in Afghanistan in November 2001, al-Zawahiri married a woman from the Mahmud tribe in Bajaur Agency. This is peculiar of Al-Qaeda leaders as Osama bin Laden also married a woman from Yemen to strengthen his ties to the Yemeni tribes. Al-Zawahiri’s marriage enabled the Deputy Leader of Al-Qaeda to develop strong tribal links to the leadership of a proscribed terrorist group, Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammad (TNSM), in Bajaur Agency. Maulana Faqir Muhammad, also from the Mahmud tribe, leads TNSM in Bajaur Agency. Similarly al-Zawahiri built a relationship with Maulana Liaquat Hussain who ran the Ziaul Uloom Taleemul Quran seminary in Chinagai in Bajaur until his death in a pre-dawn helicopter attack, ostensibly by Pakistani security forces in October 2006. Through these contacts, al-Zawahiri was able to avoid arrest and reconstitute a scattered Al-Qaeda in disarray. As the de facto head of the Majlis Shura (consultative council) of Al-Qaeda, al-Zawahiri re-established contact with Al-Qaeda cells in Pakistan and overseas. He also built alliances with groups in the Arabian Peninsula, the Horn of Africa, Southeast Asia and Al-Qaeda’s Diaspora in Iran.\(^4\)

---


\(^4\) Some of Al-Qaeda’s top leaders that are believed to be interned in Iran include head of Al-Qaeda’s Security Committee, Sayf al-Adl, head of Al-Qaeda’s Training Sub-Section, Ahmad Abdullah Ahmad alias Abu Muhammad al-Masri, Sulaiman Abu Gaith and Osama bin Laden’s two sons, Muhammad and Saad bin Laden.
Despite intermittent pressure from the US and Pakistani government, Al-Qaeda and many other foreign and Pakistani militant groups re-established a smaller and more rudimentary version of their Afghan training infrastructure in Shalikai Valley of South Waziristan in 2002-2003. Operating out of FATA and the neighboring settled areas, the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Al-Qaeda trained over 100 Westerners of Pakistani heritage to mount attacks in Europe and North America. For example the leader of the July 7, 2005 (7/7) bombers, Mohamed Siddique Khan and the leader of the failed July 21, 2005 (21/7) attacks in UK were both trained in the Dir district of NWFP. Furthermore, the Al-Qaeda leader in the UK, Dhiren Barot alias Abu Issa al-Britani aka Abu Issa al-Hindi visited Waziristan to consult the Al-Qaeda leadership while planning to attack multiple targets in UK and the US, including the Prudential building, New York Stock Exchange and Citigroup’s headquarters in New York, as well as the International Monetary Fund’s headquarters in Washington D.C.

Both Osama bin Laden and al-Zawahiri planned, prepared and executed two failed assassination attempts against General Pervez Musharraf, the President of Pakistan in December 2003. After Al-Qaeda targeted the Pakistani leadership, Arab militants including Al-Qaeda faced mounting pressure within Pakistan, since Musharraf ordered the Pakistani military and intelligence service — the Inter-Services-Intelligence (ISI) to hunt Al-Qaeda.

The subsequent military operations in the South Waziristan Agency (SWA) in late 2008 had unintended consequences. The traditional way of dealing with the tribes was hastily abandoned and instead massive military power that was used rendered the local administration and their protectors, the tribal elders, ineffective. The military officers including the Corps Commander Peshawar took over the responsibility of dealing with FATA and the militancy issue and sidelined the local administration as well as the Governor of NWFP.

The military strategy by the Pakistani government, however, had mixed results. While some foreign militants were killed in various small-scale ‘search and destroy’ military operations, Al-Qaeda’s central leadership remained unharmed and relocated to the North Waziristan Agency (NWA). With military operations becoming increasingly unpopular with the common tribesmen of South Waziristan Agency and the general populace of Pakistan, the government signed a series of peace agreements to isolate Al-Qaeda from the Pakistani Taliban. The Pakistani government’s strategy in signing the

---

III. THE THREE PEACE AGREEMENTS

The Pakistani government signed three peace agreements with the three significant tribes inhabiting the South and North Waziristan Agency, namely the Ahmadzai Wazir, Mahsud and Uthmanzai Wazir tribes. All the three peace agreements became a subject of intense debate among academic and policy makers in the world. The peace agreements were the verbal Shakai Peace Agreement with Taliban leader Nek Mohammed and tribal elders of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe in South Waziristan on April 24, 2004; the Sararogha Agreement with militant commander Baitullah Mahsud and tribal elders of the Mahsud tribe in South Waziristan on 7 February 2005; and the North Waziristan Agreement with Taliban commander, Hafiz Gul Bahadur and tribal elders of the Uthmanzai Wazir in September 2006.


After the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in November 2001, the Afghan Taliban and foreign militants belonging to Al-Qaeda, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and other North African militant groups started pouring into the South Waziristan Agency (SWA) of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Subsequently, Al-Qaeda and other foreign militant groups took refuge in the Shakai area of SWA, which is inhabited by the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe, and started regrouping themselves and organising their terrorist infrastructure. The Zalikhel clan of the Ahmadzai-Wazir tribe were the main host of the Arabs while the Yargulkel sub-clan of the Zalikhel clan became the main host of the Uzbeks on the Wana plains of South Waziristan. Nek Muhammad, an Ahmadzai Wazir tribesman and a Yargulkel known for his long association with Mullah Omar and Afghan Taliban since 1994, organised a handful of pro-Taliban militant in his area, and started giving protection to the foreign militants.

By mid-2003, the Pakistani government began receiving information about the presence of Al-Qaeda and linked terrorist groups in the Shakai area. At the same time, it started receiving international pressure, mostly from the

---

US, to disrupt the Al-Qaeda infrastructure in the SWA and kill or apprehend Al-Qaeda militant. Subsequently, Pakistan started putting pressure on the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe to handover the foreign militants or purge them out of their territory. On 2 October 2003, the Pakistani government killed an Al-Qaeda leader, Ahmad Said Khadr alias Abdur Rehman al-Canadi aka Abdur Rehman al-Masri, and Hassan Makhsum, chief of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in a gunship helicopter attack in the Shakai area.9 The incident marked the first attack by Pakistani security forces in the SWA in which a prominent Al-Qaeda leader was killed.

The subsequent military operations by Pakistan against Nek Muhammad-led Taliban militants from the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe between October 2003 and April 2004 met with stiff resistance from Nek Muhammad. During this period, Al-Qaeda gradually relocated from the Shakai area of SWA to the adjoining North Waziristan Agency (NWA), and took refuge in the Shawal Valley, Saudgai Wazir, Dattakhel, Miranshah and Mirali. The IMU, however, stayed back and fought alongside Nek Muhammad against the Pakistani security forces. In one such operation, Tahir Yuldashev, head of the IMU, was severely injured, but evaded arrest at the hands of Pakistani security forces.10 Some of the IMU militants also moved to the area inhabited by the Mahsud tribe of SWA.

On 24 April 2004, a verbal agreement, commonly known as the Shakai Peace Agreement, was reached between the Pakistani Government, the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe and Taliban militants led by Nek Muhammad.11 The Shakai agreement, however, eventually fell through due to non-compliance, with each side accusing the other of violating the agreement — thanks partly to the unwritten nature of the agreement.12 Nek Muhammad was eventually killed in a predator drone strike in June 2004.13 The abscording associates of Nek Muhammad revived the Shakai agreement in October 2004 after fresh negotiations between the government and the militants.14

---

Sararogha Peace Agreement (February 2005)

After reaching the Shakai Agreement with the Ahmadzai Wazir Tribe in April 2004, the Pakistani security forces turned their attention to the Mahsud Tribe of the South Waziristan Agency (SWA), where many foreign militants, especially the Tahir Yuldashev-led IMU militants, had taken refuge following the military operations against Ahmadzai Wazir. An extensive military operation was launched in June 2004 against the Mahsud faction of the local Taliban militants led by Abdullah Mahsud and Baitullah Mahsud. On 7 February 2005, the Pakistani government signed the Sararogha Agreement, in the pattern of Shakai Agreement, with the tribal elders of Mahsud tribe and the Mahsud Taliban militants led by Baitullah Mahsud. The Pakistani government, however, refused to grant amnesty to Abdullah Mahsud on account of his abduction of two Chinese engineers in October 2004 from the nearby area of Gomalzam. Both the Chinese were working on the Gomalzam Dam project which was being built by China’s state-run Sino Hydro Corp in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). One of the Chinese engineers was eventually killed in a subsequent rescue operation by the Pakistani security forces, while the other was recovered unharmed. Abdullah Mahsud, on his part, also refused to sign the Sararogha Agreement and preferred to travel to Afghanistan’s Zabul province to fight the US-led foreign troops. He was eventually killed by Pakistani security forces in Zhob in Balochistan Province in July 2007, while travelling back to South Waziristan from Zabul Province of Afghanistan.

North Waziristan Agreement (September 2006)

The North Waziristan Agency (NWA) assumes tremendous significance compared to any other Agency/District of FATA, since most of the leadership of Al-Qaeda and other foreign militant groups are based in NWA and operate from there. Similarly, Miranshah, the headquarters of NWA, is also the meeting place of local Taliban shura (consultative council) where almost all

the Taliban factions presently operating in North and South Waziristan Agencies in FATA, frequently meet under the leadership of regional Afghan Taliban commander, Sirajuddin Haqqani, aka Khalifa, son of Soviet-era Afghan veteran mujahideen commander, Maulana Jalaluddin Haqqani.21

Most of the cross-border infiltration of Afghanistan’s adjoining province of Khost takes place from NWA territory. Similarly, the two major tribes of NWA — Uthmanzai Wazir and Daur — continue to serve as hosts to Al-Qaeda and other foreign militant groups.

The Pakistani security forces initiated military operations in NWA against Al-Qaeda and linked terrorists groups in mid-2005. The operations started in the Shawal Valley and were later extended to the Saidgai Wazir, Dattakhel, Miranshah and Mitrail regions. The Taliban militants in North Waziristan are led by Hafiz Gul Bahadur who is an Uthmanzai Wazir, while his two deputies, Maulana Sadiq Noor and Maulana Abdul Khalique Haqqani are Daur.


However, the involvement of local tribal elders, religious clerics, parliamentarians, as well as a personal initiative by Lt. Gen. (Retd) Ali Muhammad

---

21 Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin’s network is commonly known as “Haqqani Network. Jalaluddin Haqqani is considered to be the closest aide of Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar. Haqqani had also remained a prominent militant commander in the 1980s resistance against the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. He remained a minister during the Taliban government and a top consultant to Mullah Omar. Haqqani Network has recently emerged as the most dangerous and challenging foe for the ISAF-NATO coalition forces in Afghanistan and is close to Al-Qaeda leadership and involved in a series of attacks in Kabul, including the Serena hotel bombing in early 2008 and attack on President Karzai during the annual day military parade in April 2008. Intizar Ali, ‘The Haqqani Network and Cross Border Terrorism in Afghanistan,’ Terrorism Monitor, Volume 6, Issue 6 (March 24, 2008), Jamestown Foundation, http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?issue_id=4431.

22 Hamza Rabia, an Egyptian by nationality, was believed to be No.3 of Al-Qaeda and head of the organisation’s external operations. ‘A Look at the Predator Drone That Killed Libi’, Daily Times, 3 February 2008


Jan Orakzai, a tribal native from the Orakzai Agency of FATA who was appointed as the Governor of NWFP in May 2006, resulted in a ceasefire between the security forces and the local Taliban militants in June 2006. It was also reported that the late Mullah Abdullah, acting on the orders of Mullah Omar, the supreme leader of the Afghan Taliban, was instrumental in advising the Pakistani Taliban to negotiate a ceasefire with the Pakistani government. The ceasefire eventually led to the infamous September 2006 North Waziristan Agreement. The agreement was signed between the Pakistani government and local tribal elders of North Waziristan, local clerics and the Taliban. Unlike the previous agreements, the September 2006 Agreement was a written one.

IV. CONTENTS OF THE PEACE AGREEMENTS

The three peace agreements — Shakai, Sararogha and North Waziristan — consist of more or less the same stipulations. Some of the important stipulations in the three peace agreements are:

1. Law enforcement agencies, government installations and officers will not be attacked and there will be no targeted killing whatsoever.

2. The Taliban will set up a parallel administration in North and South Waziristan. The Pakistan Government will be the working body. The Political Administration will be contacted for resolving issues. The Administration will resolve issues according to the laws implemented by the respective tribes and Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR).

3. There will be no cross border infiltration into the neighboring country Afghanistan for any type of armed activity. However, there will be no restriction on traveling according to the rules and regulations for the purpose of business, trade and meeting relatives.

---

25 According to reports, Governor Orakzai was instrumental in the signing of the peace agreement and described the accord as “unprecedented in tribal history.” See Barbara Flett, “Analysis: Pakistan’s Deal With Taliban,” BBC, 6 September 2006.


4. There will be no incursions into the settled districts of North West Frontier Province (NWFP) adjacent to North and South Waziristan, nor will there be a parallel government.

5. All foreigners should leave the North and South Waziristan Agencies. If anyone is not in a position to leave the area, they will be allowed to stay in the area on surety or guarantee of the local tribesmen. Such foreigners should remain peaceful and honour all clauses of the agreement.

6. Every tribesmen arrested during the military operation by the Pakistani government will be released. They will not be arrested again for what they have done in the past. The Government will lift all the public sanctions.

7. The Government will remove all the new check posts from the roads and soldiers and levis will be stationed at old check posts, as they were in the past.

8. After the pact, the Government will continue routine ground and air operations.

9. For the recovery of those who were innocently killed during the operation and as a compensation for the property that was damaged during the operation, the Government will provide grants.

10. There is no ban on the use of weapons according to the tribal traditions and there is no ban on weapons for the government either; but the ban on large weapons will continue.

11. The implementation of pact will start with the removal of Army check posts.

V. ENFORCEMENT MECHANISM OF THE PEACE AGREEMENTS

The enforcement mechanism of the three agreements consisted of a committee comprising of local tribal elders and religious scholars, which was assigned the responsibility of maintaining constant communication between the government and the respective tribes to review and ensure implementation of the pact. Similarly, in cases of non-compliance, action could be taken against the tribes.31

The peace committees formed immediately following the agreements failed to provide a useful mechanism to reduce the threat of non-compliance.

---

Made up of tribal elders and the clerics, each tribe and area had its own committee. It was earlier thought that most of the Taliban commanders had come from the seminaries, and therefore the latter would be able to exercise their influence on the former and help in making the peace agreements a success. Similarly, the tribal elders, which exercised considerable influence and were respected within their respective tribes, had become a spent force when the Taliban forced them into submission or acquiesced them to Taliban rule after killing more than 200 pro-government tribal elders between 2004 and 2007. Although the enforcement mechanism did come into play whenever there was an issue between the Taliban militants and the government, it was not effective all the time.

It was observed that the peace agreements failed to rein in the local Taliban and foreign militants in the Waziristan region. Soon after signing the peace agreements, the local Taliban denied the presence of foreign militants in the area.32 They continued their cross-border infiltration into Afghanistan to attack foreign troops based in the country. Similarly, the local Taliban continued to target pro-government tribal elders and individuals with impunity. According to an estimate, more than 200 tribal elders were killed between 2004 and 2006.33 Also, the Taliban openly flouted the peace agreements and went ahead with establishing parallel Taliban governments in South and North Waziristan regions.34 Since the signing of the September 2006 peace agreement, the local Taliban groups have also begun to extend their influence and activities in the settled districts of the NWFP.35

However, the implementation of peace agreements varied from case to case. In some instances, for example, the Shakai Agreement of April 2004, the peace agreements remained an effective instrument in rein in the Taliban activities while in others, it provided a much needed breathing space to the local Taliban to regroup and strengthen their hold on their areas. While General Ali Muhammad Jan Orakzai, former Governor of the NWFP and FATA, continued to remain optimistic towards the efficacy of the peace agreements, latter developments in 2007 suggested that all is not well on the ground. Having failed to rein in the Pakistani Taliban militants, Orakzai resigned in January 2008.

At present, the security situation in both the North and South Waziristan Agencies remain precarious. Although a fragile peace exists with the Uthmanzai Wazirs and the Ahmadzai Wazirs since the peace agreements with them were revived, trouble in dealing with the Mahsud militants continues to haunt the government.

VI. POST-PEACE AGREEMENT SITUATION

Security Situation in Ahmadzai Wazir Tribal Territory

The security situation in Ahmadzai Wazir areas in the South Waziristan Agency (SWA) has improved considerably and the Shakai agreement is working effectively. In March 2007, tribal elders and Taliban commanders Malik Khanan and Mullah Nazir of the Ahmadzai Wazir Taliban militants purged Uzbek militants linked to IMU along with their local supporters—Commander Haji Omar, Noor Islam and Haji Sharif—and also put an end to cross-border infiltration into Afghanistan’s neighbouring provinces of Paktia and Paktika. The clash between IMU and the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe erupted when IMU militants attempted to assassinate a local tribal elder of the Zariakhel sub-clan in March 2007.\(^{36}\) There were also reports of excesses committed by Uzbeks against the local tribesmen and the former were blamed for involvement in the killing of tribal elders, kidnappings for ransom in the region and attempting to impose their version of Islam—the Wahabi doctrine—on the local people.\(^{37}\)

The Pakistani government seized the opportunity and provided material and human resources to the tribal elders and Mullah Nazir to crush the IMU militants. Following the eviction of IMU militants from the area, relations between Mullah Nazir and the Pakistani government improved considerably and the former is now described as a pro-government Taliban leader.

To maintain peace in the region, the government also initiated development schemes in the region, which include building an airport and a highway that bypasses the Mehsud territory, thereby freeing the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe from the threat of blockade and pressure tactics of the Mahsuds.\(^{38}\)

However, differences between Mullah Nazir and pro-Uzbek militants as well as Baitullah Mahsud continue to pose threat to the latter. On 6 January 2008, Uzbek militants attacked the office of Mullah Nazir and Khanan


\(^{38}\) Iqbal Khattak, “Airport in Wana will cater to civil, military flights,” Daily Times, 28 November 2007.
separately. However, both survived the onslaught.\(^9\) On 13 January, the Uzbek militants launched a second attack on Malik Khanan, which failed to kill him.\(^40\) The attempt led to a worsening of relations between the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe and the Mahsud tribe since the former blamed the latter for giving sanctuary to the IMU-linked Uzbeks. Some reports have indicated that the government has approached the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe to help the security forces in their ongoing operation against Baitullah Mahsud-led Taliban militants.\(^41\) However, it would be a dangerous move since it may ignite tribal warfare between Ahmadzai Wazir and Mahsud Tribe, which could require every tribesman to come to the assistance of their tribe.

In an effort to help bridge the differences between Mullah Nazir, IMU militants and pro-IMU local militants and Baitullah Mahsud, a three-member delegation of the Afghan Taliban visited the South Waziristan Agency (SWA) in mid-January 2008 to hold talks with Mullah Nazir, the supreme leader of the Ahmadzai Taliban militants.\(^42\) The topic of their discussion was the return of the pro-Uzbek Ahmadzai Wazir Taliban commanders — Haji Omar, Maulvi Abbas and Maulvi Sharif — and IMU militants to Wana, the headquarters of SWA. These Taliban commanders were purged from the tribe when they supported the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)-linked Uzbeks against the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe and Mullah Nazir in March 2007. The talks, however, were inconclusive when Mullah Nazir reportedly offered to allow the absconding Taliban commanders to return to the Ahmadzai Wazir territory if they pledged allegiance to him.\(^43\) On the issue of the return of IMU-linked Uzbeks to Wana, tribal elders of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe continue to resist the demand.\(^44\) Apart from discussing the issue of the return of Haji Omar and others, it was surmised that the Afghan Taliban may also be weighing the preparation of the local Ahmadzai Wazir Taliban for their participation in the upcoming “spring offensive 2008” in Afghanistan against ISAF-NATO troops. It remains to be seen how Mullah Nazir maintains a balance between the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani government, since he is heavily dependent on the support of the latter.

\(^40\) "Two Uzbeks Killed in Attack on Pro-Govt Elder," Daily Times, 14 January 2008.
\(^43\) Ibid.
\(^44\) Ibid.
against Uzbek militants and the absconding Taliban leaders. It also needs to be mentioned that cross-border infiltration across South Waziristan-Afghanistan border has tremendously decreased since May 2007, due to pressure by the government on Mullah Nazir. It was also reported that Haji Omar and other Ahmadzai Wazir Taliban leaders have shifted in December 2007 to the North Waziristan Agency (NWA) from the South Waziristan Agency (SWA) where they had been taking refuge since April 2007.45

Security Situation in the Uthmanzai Wazir and Daur Tribal Territory

Following non-compliance of the September 2006 peace agreement by the local Taliban militants of North Waziristan Agency, Pakistani government redeployed security forces in the region in July 2007, and started monitoring the movement of local and foreign militants in the region. The deployment of security forces coincided with the launching of "Operation Silence" against Lal Majsid (Red Mosque) clerics in Islamabad on 3 July 2007. On 14 July 2007, the local Taliban militants threatened to scrap the peace agreement if the government did not withdraw its forces within 24 hours.46 Subsequently, renewed clashes took place between the Pakistani security forces and the local Taliban militants. In October 2007, the government used gunship helicopters and airplanes to bomb militants' hideouts in Mirali area of North Waziristan Agency, which killed a large number of militants as well as civilians.47 Soon after, a rift developed between the local and IMU-linked Uzbeks, with the locals holding the Uzbeks responsible for the recent killings.48 A tribal lashkar (militia) was also raised by the Daur tribe under the leadership of Nek Muhammad Daur alias Nikami to evict Uzbeks and other foreign militants from the Mirali area. However the lashkar failed to achieve much, since the foreigners had the backing of the local Taliban.49

With no end in sight, the local tribal elders and parliamentarians initiated efforts to effect a ceasefire between the two warring parties in October 2007. Subsequently, the local Taliban militants led by Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North

Waziristan announced a unilateral ceasefire on 17 December 2007, saying that they would not attack Pakistani security forces till January 1, 2008.50 An unnamed militant commander told *The News* that the ceasefire decision was taken in a meeting of senior militant commanders held with tribal militants’ central leader, Hafiz Gul Bahadur, in the chair. He said Hafiz Gul Bahadur directed his fellow militants to stop attacks on security forces in North Waziristan till 1 January, 2008. The militant commander also said that militants would have no objection over movement of security forces in the region during the ceasefire. He added that Bahadur directed his fighters to avoid abducting soldiers during the truce and let them travel wherever they wanted to go.54 The militants twice renewed the ceasefire,52 before renewing the September 2006 peace agreement, albeit with slight modifications.53

**Standoff with the Mahsud Tribal Militants**

The Mahsud Taliban militants are led by Baitullah Mahsud, who has recently emerged as the most dangerous and notorious Taliban warlord in the entire FATA belt. Baitullah was blamed for recruiting, training and conducting a series of suicide attacks throughout Pakistan. In August 2007, Baitullah scrapped the Sararogha peace agreement on the grounds that Pakistani security forces were being redeployed in the area.54 The abduction of nearly 300 soldiers near Laddah in August 2007 and demands for the release of 24 terrorists and would-be-suicide bombers being held in the Pakistani jails was perceived as humiliating for the Pakistani government.

Similarly, Baitullah Mahsud was named as a prime suspect in the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, chairperson of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) on 27 December 2007. Maulana Saleh Shah, a senator from the South Waziristan Agency, reportedly said that Baitullah Mahsud, the leader of the newly formed Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (Taliban Movement of Pakistan), had

53 In the renewed peace agreement, the Daur Tribe was also included as a party. It is pertinent to mention that foreign militants are mainly based in the Mirali, Miranshah and their adjoining areas which are inhabited by the Daur Tribe, and the September 2006 peace agreement did not include the Daur tribe and hence they were under no compulsion to evict foreign militants from their areas.
threatened to welcome Benazir with bombs on her return to the country—
an allegation he later denied.

The announcement of the formation of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on 14 December 2007 under the leadership of infamous Baitullah Mahsud, and its threat to conduct terrorist attacks throughout Pakistan if military operations are not stopped in Swat and other parts of FATA was another reason that forced the Pakistani government to contemplate a military operation against Baitullah. The subsequent terrorist attacks on military installations in the South Waziristan Agency, especially the British-era forts of Splatoon, Sararogha and Ladha finally forced the Pakistani government to initiate military operation in the Mahsud area in South Waziristan Agency (SWA).

Formed to centralise their command under Baitullah Mahsud of South Waziristan, TTP’s stated aim is to enforce Sharia, unite against the NATO forces in Afghanistan and conduct “defensive jihad” against the Pakistan Army. Baitullah Mahsud was declared the leader of the movement, while Maulana Hafiz Gul Bahadur, commander of North Waziristan Taliban, and Maulana Faqir Muhammad, head of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammad (TNSM), were declared as the second and third deputy leaders of the militant group. Similarly, Maulana Fazullah of TNSM in Swat and Maulvi Omer of Bajaur Agency were declared as the Secretary General and official spokesman of the TTP respectively. Considering TTP’s relationship to Al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban presents a much bigger and immediate threat to Pakistan than the Afghan Taliban.

Furthermore, the TTP’s collective membership is assessed at 30,000 to 35,000. It was formed in the lead up to Benazir Bhutto’s assassination and different Pakistani Taliban groups throughout FATA, North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and mainland Pakistan that traditionally pledged loyalty to Mullah Omar, the Afghan Taliban leader, united under Baitullah Mesud, to coordinate their militant activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

To ward off the threat being posed by Baitullah Mahsud, especially in the wake of Mahsud’s attacks on military forts in the South Waziristan Agency in January 2008, the Pakistan security forces conducted a three-pronged military operation in January 2008 against Baitullah Mahsud-led Taliban militants code named “Operation Tri-Star” of which “Operation Zalzala (earthquake)”

was one effective part. The Pakistani security forces made significant gains against Mahsud’s Taliban militants and occupied strategic places in Laddah, Makin, Spinkai Raghzai, Kotkai and Tiarza, aimed at encircling Baitullah Mahsud. A unilateral ceasefire was effected after Baitullah Mahsud extended a truce to the government through Senator Maulana Saleh Shah of the South Waziristan Agency. Subsequently, a ceasefire was observed amid negotiations that are underway with the newly-elected Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)-led government in Pakistan and military operations have ceased temporarily.

It was also reported that Mullah Omar, the supreme leader or “Ameer-al-Montineen” (Leader of the Faithful) of the Afghan Taliban disapproved of Baitullah Mahsud’s act of forming the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), since the former does not want the Pakistani or local Taliban to conduct fight against Pakistani security forces. Omar, instead, wanted the local Taliban to concentrate their energies and human resource in fighting ISAF-NATO troops in Afghanistan. While there are unconfirmed reports that Mullah Omar has sacked Baitullah from the ranks of the Taliban, the fact remains that the Afghan Taliban are heavily reliant on the Pakistani Taliban for the crucial support and sanctuary the latter are offering them. Also, the Afghan Taliban do not exercise operational control over the Pakistani Taliban who maintain a separate command and control authority, although the latter have vowed allegiance to Mullah Omar.

According to some reports, the Taliban factions in North and South Waziristan, headed by Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Mullah Nazir have distanced themselves from Baitullah. The distancing of Gul Bahadur came in December 2007, when Mullah Omar expressed his disapproval of Baitullah’s strategy to form TTP and his decision to fight the Pakistani troops. Gul Bahadur announced a ceasefire with the Pakistani security forces in late December 2007, which led to the revival of the September 2006 peace agreement. Similarly, there were also reports that Hafiz Gul Bahadur had asked Baitullah in January 2008 not to use the North Waziristani territory for conducting attacks against Pakistani security forces, which could jeopardize

---

the negotiations leading up to a peace agreement that Bahadur was having at that time with the government.

A deep schism also reportedly exists between the leadership and followers of the TTP over the issue of whether to fight a "defensive" war against Pakistani government and security forces. Some of the militants and mid-level leadership of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) in Bajaur and Swat believe that they are more comfortable with fighting the ISAF-NATO troops in Afghanistan instead of waging a war inside Pakistan. They also claim that they have owed allegiance to Mullah Omar and not to Baitullah Mahsud and therefore, would abide by the instructions of Mullah Omar.

Meanwhile, Baitullah Mahsud continues to strengthen his relationship with the Al-Qaeda leadership presently based in the North Waziristan Agency. Mahsud is reportedly receiving financial and logistical support from Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda also favours attacks against Pakistani government and security forces. As such, the policy of Afghan Taliban and Baitullah Mahsud-led Pakistani Taliban aligning themselves with Al-Qaeda is facing serious problems and is working at cross-purposes with each other. This is also evident from the recent statement by Mullah Omar in which he said that the Taliban movement is not a threat to other countries. According to him, "This is our right to defend our country. We are not a threat to other countries. But we have to use our rights when our country is occupied by foreign forces." He also emphasised that the people of other countries should pressure their governments not to send troops to Afghanistan.

The peace agreements have had their ups and downs. They influenced the developments in tribal and mainland Pakistan. For instance the cessation of military operations by the Pakistani military led the local Taliban to strengthen their stronghold in the region, which in turn benefited Al-Qaeda and other foreign militant groups taking refuge in the area. A lack of clarity on the part of the Pakistani government and its policy of "one step forward, two step backwards" seem to have given room for the Pakistani Taliban to strengthen itself. In due time, this could benefit their foreign guests, such as Al-Qaeda.

---

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
VII. POST-FEBRUARY 2008 ELECTIONS AND THE GOVERNMENT-MILITANTS’ PARIAHS

The inauguration of a new government led by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in the February 2008 elections gave the impression that the security situation in the country, especially in FATA, would improve. This impression was a result of pre-election statements by various political parties who disagreed with Musharraf-era policies, including that of the “pro-US” policies in the war on terror and vowed to initiate peace talks with the tribal militants. Some of the constituents of the newly-elected government also declared that they would favour the signing of peace agreements to bring an end to militant activities in the country. While militant violence continues in the country in the post-election era, its intensity has gone down considerably.

However, there are signs that the new government’s approach may not succeed in bringing an end to terrorist violence and the country may fall back into a spiral of violence. This is because the demands put forward by the Baitullah-led Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) may not allow any future peace deal to stay in place for a long time. Secondly, the new government is comprised of various elements with diverse approaches towards the issue of militancy that may result in differences and finally a lack of consensus in reaching a comprehensive peace deal with the Taliban militants. Thirdly, Pakistan may not be able to sustain the pressure of the international community, especially the US and ISAF-NATO forces in Afghanistan, in the long term if the Taliban militants continue to violate any future peace deal with the government. Also, the TTP’s repeated statements to continue their fight in Afghanistan and demands of a withdrawal of Pakistani troops from the Pak-Afghan border and the FATA region as a whole may not go down well with the international community. ISAF-NATO has already expressed their reservations to Pakistan over any future peace deal with the TTP when they announced a sharp increase of more than 50 percent in cross-border attacks compared to the number to attacks in May 2007. According to the ISAF-NATO spokesman, James Appathurai, “the concern is that the deals struck by the Pakistan government and extremist groups in the Tribal Areas may be allowing them to have a safe haven.” He said that ISAF-NATO has communicated their concerns to the Pakistani authorities. “We do not want to interfere in internal affairs but we have every right to communicate our concerns.”

The recent predator drone strike on Damadola village in Bajaur Agency on 14 May 2008 by the US left dozens of local and foreign militants dead. According to the New York Times, an increasing frustration on the part of the

US Administration vis-à-vis the new Pakistani government’s policy of signing peace deals with the Pakistani Taliban militants and showing little concern over stopping Pak-Afghan border attacks is pushing US Administration to consider cross-border raids into Pakistani tribal areas.\(^1\)

The US Deputy Secretary of State, John Negroponte, also made it very clear on 5 May 2008, when he said that the US “will not be satisfied until all the violent extremism emanating from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas is brought under control. It is unacceptable for extremists to use those areas to plan, train for, or execute attacks against Afghanistan, Pakistan, or the wider world. Their ongoing ability to do so is a barrier to lasting security, both regionally and internationally. Pakistan’s Government must bring the frontier area under its control as quickly as possible and we are certainly prepared to provide appropriate assistance to the Government of Pakistan in order to achieve that objective.” He also said that “a successful strategy in the tribal areas must include the possibility of military operations.”\(^2\)

Finally, any future peace agreement entered into by the new government is more likely to fail in the medium and long-term since the Taliban intends to continue with their Talibanisation drive and have declared an intention to impose their Taliban-style Shariah in the country. According to Maulana Faqir Mohammad of the TTP, “the removal of President Pervez Musharraf, a review of the country’s foreign policy and the enforcement of Shariah law in the Tribal Areas are the three demands that are must for lasting peace in the settled and tribal areas of NWFP.” He further said that “Islam comes first, then Pakistan.”\(^3\)

It has been witnessed that, since March 2008, the Taliban have intensified their vigilante activities in FATA and the NWFP region. The recent killings of alleged criminals in the Mohmand and Orakzai Agencies in May 2008\(^4\) as well as religious edicts calling upon people to grow beards are cases in point.\(^5\)

---


Similarly, the Taliban have banned NGOs and women’s education in some districts of the NWFP and Orakzai Agency as well.\(^76\)

The long term strategic significance of Al-Qaeda successfully carving out a semi-safe-haven in FATA is yet to be realised. In addition to the inaccessible Pakistan-Afghanistan border emerging as the new headquarters of the global jihad movement, Al-Qaeda and its likeminded groups are seeking to change the geopolitics of the region. Using FATA, Al-Qaeda and its associated groups are attempting to indoctrinate self radicalised homegrown individuals in the West and recruit them to conduct attacks in Europe and North America. Operating from FATA, groups trained in that region are mounting attacks in Western China (Xinjiang), Iraq, Algeria, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Central Asian countries and other conflict zones. As the failed assassination attempts on leaders in Pakistan and Afghanistan show, the philosophy of Al-Qaeda and its associated groups is to remove all those leaders that are hostile to the terrorists and the extremists and are viewed by Al-Qaeda as “American assets” who are part of the US-led coalition against terrorism.

Almost all the terrorist and extremist groups that existed in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the Taliban rule in Afghanistan (1994-2001) have reconstituted themselves and maintain a robust presence in FATA. Al-Qaeda is providing the crucial knowledge and methodology to mobilise not only the foreign but also the domestic terrorist groups. The tribes in FATA supported the anti-Soviet multinational Afghan mujahideen campaign between 1979 and 1989. Today, the tribes in FATA perceive Western intervention in Afghanistan as an extension of the past where non-Muslims occupied Muslim lands. Henceforth, the hardline Pashtun nationalists and the Islamists are supporting the fight against the US and their allies. Like Sudan and Afghanistan, which remained a hub for terrorist groups from 1991 to 1996 and 1996 to 2001 respectively, FATA has emerged as the most important terrorist sanctuary in recent history.

**VIII. THE FUTURE**

Today, FATA is of unprecedented significance to the international security and intelligence community for three reasons.

Firstly, after the US-led intervention in Afghanistan, the ground zero of terrorism has moved from Afghanistan to FATA. Today, FATA is the single most important base of Al-Qaeda’s operations, where its leaders, trainers and

planners are located. Similarly, the leadership of Afghan Taliban, Pakistani Taliban, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Islamic Jihad Group (IJU), the Libyan Islamic Fighters Group (LIFG) and a dozen other groups are located in FATA. Both their operational and ideological leaders are protected by the Pakistani Taliban, a group that emerged after Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban moved to FATA in late 2001 and early 2002.

Secondly, FATA has become a sanctuary for research and development in explosives, training and directing operations globally. This includes the attacks against not only Afghanistan and mainland Pakistan but the Middle East and the West. As long as FATA is a sanctuary, the incessant attacks against coalition forces in Afghanistan will not stop. Furthermore, the spate of attacks on mainland Pakistan will continue. This includes the multiple assassination attempts on Pervez Musharraf and the successful assassination of Benazir Bhutto. The UK bombings and several operations disrupted in the West such as the liquid plot of August 2006 were planned in FATA. Several arrests in 2008 in Europe, including Germany, Spain and Turkey, involved recruits trained in FATA.

Thirdly, Al-Qaeda, working together with likeminded groups, has invested in sustained propaganda to radicalise the Muslim masses, including the migrant communities. Al-Qaeda has unleashed a home grown threat. In the 12 months ending in December 2007, Al-Qaeda produced 97 videos, or a video every three days. The aim of Al-Qaeda is to politicise, radicalise and mobilise Muslims worldwide into supporting and participating in the fight against the West. In the absence of a robust government response to counter Al-Qaeda’s message, Muslims are susceptible to extremist propaganda. Heightened extremism leads to support and participation in terrorism.

The developments in FATA have played the most important role enabling in shaping the post 9-11 threat environment. Operating out of FATA, Al-Qaeda has unleashed a dispersed and vibrant threat by spreading its ideology globally. Al-Qaeda is accepting new like-minded groups seeking to name themselves after Al-Qaeda to adopt its ideology of global jihad and operational tactics of suicide. Al-Qaeda has galvanised and mobilised many disparate Islamist groups in the global south creating an Al-Qaeda movement. With representation from more than two dozen groups, FATA has become the de facto headquarters of the global jihad movement. Furthermore, Al-Qaeda has penetrated Muslim territorial communities in the South as well as Diaspora and migrant communities in the West. Directly and through its associated groups, Al-Qaeda is offering research-intensive training to home grown and other terrorists to conduct spectacular attacks, especially against the US; its
Allies and its friends. Despite being the most hunted terrorist leadership, Al-Qaeda is directing, facilitating, supporting, and approving key operations against its enemies from FATA.

An addition to Al-Qaeda directing the global jihad movement from FATA, this enclave provides sanctuary to multiple groups. Almost all the North African groups now active in Iraq maintain a presence in FATA. Compared to the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistan Taliban has grown significantly in numerical strength, power and influence over the last five years. As most adults are armed on the Afghan-Pakistan border, conducting military operations in FATA is a monumental challenge. Over 1000 Pakistani soldiers have been killed, 350 Pakistani soldiers kidnapped (a few beheaded as a deterrent and others released) and others threatened against intrusion.

The threat complexion in FATA has changed dramatically in the last six years. Over 200 secular tribal leaders have been killed and Taliban-like religious leaders have come to power. Today, there are new groups and new players. TTP has emerged as the most dominant player and its constituents present an unprecedented challenge even to a well-structured and well-led Pakistani military and the US intelligence community. As long as the recently formed TTP and its constituent groups survive, Al-Qaeda, especially its leadership, will survive. Despite efforts by the US, its allies and friends, six years after 9-11, the threat groups that attacked the US on 9-11 including its masterminds have survived. Despite unprecedented cooperation and collaboration by the Pakistani authorities with Western governments, the threat is spreading from tribal Pakistan to mainland Pakistan and beyond. The assassination of Benazir Bhutto and several other attacks initiated in FATA is testimony to the existing and growing threat. In the coming years, the presence of both foreign and local Jihadists in FATA or Al-Qaeda will be an enduring challenge to both regional and international security.

IX. CONCLUSION

Terrorism and extremism can be engaged on four fronts, political, military, legal, and social, with each front exhibiting a problem set unique from the others. The first two are self explanatory; legal refers to the need for competent law enforcement and immigration policies and activities. These are necessary in order to impede the threat of community infiltration by terrorist organisations. As in the case of FATA, to prevent the radicalisation of the tribes, the social front is the most crucial. However, sustained US pressure on the Pakistani government to crackdown on Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban led the Pakistani military to use overwhelming force turning public support for the Pakistani Taliban and the groups it protected.
Winning and sustaining public support through a developmental response is paramount to fight both terrorism and insurgency. Developing a community through Humanitarian Operations plays a vital role in denying a support network and preventing terrorist and insurgent organisations from thriving. Humanitarian development projects assist in reducing these threats and by winning over the hearts and minds of a local populace. This is accomplished by the following means:

- They improve the quality of life for impoverished regions instilling hope.
- Government sponsored events often mean a security presence which can provide a sense of safety in the community, halting any hostile activity (this may also result in a backfire).
- Shuts down extremist propaganda by portraying the host agency in a positive manner.
- The occupying agency is more likely to be viewed as a passive element rather than an aggressive invasion force.
- Aid projects can “soften” an area decreasing hostilities, reducing the likelihood of conflict.
- Allows a foothold for a base of operations inside a given area without resorting to tactical means.
- Can be used to gauge the atmospherics of a community (no takers for free medicine in an indigent society could serve as a likely indicator for opposition).
- Humanitarian projects provide opportunity for basic information gathering (census, political polling etc.) which can aid in the planning of future events.
- Improvement efforts in a moderate extremist community give prospect to conversion preventing their further radicalization.
- These ventures give the host agency the chance to educate a community on current events.

A double suicide attack was mounted against Benazir Bhutto on the day she arrived in Pakistan to campaign for the 2008 national elections. On the way to a rally in Karachi on 18 October 2007, two explosions killed 136 people and injured 450, but she escaped. On 27 December 2007, Bhutto was assassinated in Rawalpindi in a double sniper and suicide attack that is typical of Al-Qaeda’s modus operandi.77

77 The head of Al-Qaeda’s Finance Committee and Tanzim Al-Qaeda fi al-Khurasan, Mustafa Ahmed Muhammad Uthman aka Mustafa Abu al-Yazid claimed responsibility for the death of former
While a smooth transition to democracy has taken place in Pakistan after the successful elections on 18 February 2008, the Pakistani military and the intelligence service continue to remain important in Pakistan in the context of Pakistan's war on terrorism.

---

Pakistani former prime minister Benazir Bhutto. Yazid in a telephonic call to Adnkronos International (AKI) from somewhere in the Pakistani tribal areas. Yazid said that “We terminated the most precious American asset which vowed to defeat [the] mujahadeen.” Please see “Pakistan: Al-Qaeda Claims Bhutto’s Death,” http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Security/?id=1.0.1710322457.