

Terrorism and Social Engineering: A Distorted Picture of the Pakhtuns

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- p- ISSN: 2521-2982
- e-ISSN: 2707-4587
- ISSN-L: 2521-2982

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Abstract

Much of the ongoing terrorism in Pakistan is happening on and in the context of the Pakhtun region. This has severe possible implications for the present and future of the region and its inhabitants. It is imperative, therefore, to objectively analyze the process so that effective policy options are adopted for its eradication. Relying mainly on secondary data, the current study is a qualitative analysis of the nature of terrorism and its possible relation with the Pakhtun culture. It concludes that the image of Pakhtuns and their culture is distorted through a conscious policy. The study further concludes that the current terrorism on the Pakhtun land is a product of social engineering.

Key Words: Pakhtuns, Terrorism, Social Engineering, Cultural Distortion

Introduction

Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been the focus of much foreign attention, especially after 9/11. This is understandable. The area is inhabited by one of the largest tribal groups in the world, the Pakhtuns. The unique culture of the people, rising Talibanization and the Pakistani military's ambivalent policy to cope with the latter are all critical issues that, arguably, has indirect implications for the security of the whole world. In fact, if we include the Afghan side of the border, the area contains dozens of ethnic groups. The Pakhtuns are by far the largest ethnic group inhabiting the center, but the region is also home to Baloch, Kitranis, Noristanis, Baruhis, Chitralis, Shinas, Gujjars, Hazaras, Hindkos, Tajiks, Uramrs, Kalamis and Wakhis (Johnson & Mason, 2008). The fact that only the Pakhtuns have been prone to religious militancy and the prevailing Talibanization is an issue that needs careful attention. This leads one to ask an important question. How Pakhtuns cultural values are influenced by, and impact upon, terrorism and the war on terrorism?

The second section of the study provides a thorough review of the literature. The third section is an introduction to the theory of Social Engineering. The fourth is a discussion about the possible distortion of the Pakhtun society through a policy of social engineering. The fifth section draws some conclusions from the study.

Review of the Literature

Discussing the relationship between culture and terrorism, one finds two views in the literature. Terrorism is a kind of warfare, and anthropologists have long studied the relationship between war and culture, especially in pre-industrial societies (Snyder, 2002). Establishing a causal relationship is not easy; however, there are scholars on both sides. Writers supporting a cultural explanation of war assert that behavior at the international level is determined by culture. This line of thinking suggests that people take pain to carry

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out myth-supported rituals. They internalize the messages prescribed by the culture. Ultimately, it is the socialization of the people in a particular cultural setting which determined their action (Ross, 1986; Crenshaw, 2000). For example, it is alleged, in the Pakhtun's case, that Pakhtuns' participation in the ongoing militancy is mainly because of *Melmastya* (hospitality or protection), or *Panah* (Asylum), an element of *Pakhtunwali* (the Pakhtun Code of Honor). It is further argued that in the post-cold war era, Pakhtuns provided sanctuary to hundreds of international jihadis, mainly Arabs, but also Chechens, Central Asians and Chinese under this code. This claim is strengthened by the Taliban regime's refusal in Afghanistan to hand over Osama Bin Laden to the US on the same ground, as they argued it was contrary to the Pakhtun cultural values (Romi, 2009). Furthermore, due to the long-lasting blood feuds and inter-personal violence among the Pakhtuns and their suspicion of authority, Pakhtun society is considered as based upon structured violence, unruly, static, anti-change and anti-modernism that would resist any centralizing state apparatus, thereby providing a favorable environment for terrorism (Taj, 2009).

However, it will be interesting to note whether this characteristic of the Pakhtun society (internal violence), limited to inter-personal, inter-family or at the most inter-tribal domain, has any relation with modern-day terrorism whose ideology transcends national boundaries. Proponents of this school of thought mainly rely on psychological explanations like the social identity theory (Snyder, 2002). Not fully identical, but related to this argument is the position held by Nader Kathleen and Danial Yael (2005). Terrorism, in their view, develops as a result of a clash of cultures on fault lines along with civilizations with different histories, religious practices, and gender-related issues. Culture, according to them, may not only help spark terrorism but also can be used in healing the post-terrorism traumatic conditions. As the positive cultural change in the shape of the fulfilment of basic psychological needs, for example, healing from the past wounds, the promotion of inclusive culture in children, positive ideologies, supportive communities, and education that promotes peace can help promote a culture of caring and peace (Staub, 2003). But on the other hand, the denial of the above opportunities leads towards aggression.

Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason (2008), support the above interpretation when discussing the problem of terrorism in the Pakhtun belt. To them, the problem of religious terrorism and extremism and the challenge faced by the United States in the region is a "unique cultural problem" contained in a single ethnolinguistic group, the Pakhtuns. The only leader, they say, who can unite the Pakhtuns for a single cause is a typical mullah or religious personality. Taliban, according to them, is not a new or unique phenomenon. In the past, too, there have been such leaders like the Faqir of Ipi, who mobilized people for a holy war or jihad by exploiting their religious inclination contained in culture. Akbar S. Ahmed (1976), however, does not agree with them. According to him, the ideal leader for a Pakhtun combines both temporal and spiritual authority. "The prototype of the Pathan leader is Ahmad Shah Abdali: Sufi by temperament, warrior king by profession and Muslim by definition" (1976, pp. 52-53).

The important part of Johnson and Mason argument is that the state, through a deliberate policy of social engineering, made every effort first to radicalize and then to exploit the Pakhtun society for its own security interests. The most obvious is the search for a strategic depth through a friendly regime in Afghanistan. However, the writers can be criticized for the same argument on the grounds that the state, due to its superior economic, political, and propagandist power, could use any other ethnolinguistic group. Culture alone should not be blamed for this. The fact that they chose Pakhtuns could be because of their past history, geostrategic importance of their region, and their numerical superiority over other ethnic groups in the region. For example, Dr. Khadim Hussain (2008) pointed out in a study that the causes of terrorism in the Pakhtun region are many, including ideological, political, economic, political, economic, and geostrategic. However, another important point raised by Johnson and Mason is that solution to this problem lies not in extending the writ of the central government but in empowering the tribal elders and restoring the balance to a cultural system that has been in turmoil since the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979.

The above approach is influenced, mainly by the writings of the colonial administrators, but also imitated by indigenous writers in the later years. Unfortunately, Pakhtun's history is mostly written by foreigners in the colonial era. The British- faced with a formidable force in the shape of Pakhtuns, difficult to defeat and strongly resistant to foreign rule- camouflaged their failures by overemphasizing the bravery of the people. This sometimes led to the point of dehumanization, calling them wolves and panthers (Caroe, 1958). The Pathan (1958), by Olaf Caroe, is the best illustration of this approach. His book is the most comprehensive study of Pakhtuns. It covers their history, culture, genealogy, national character, tribal structure, resistance movements and politics. While one must acknowledge that it is the first and most authentic source of Pakhtun history and genealogy, however, the author's own emotional sensationalism and his romanticism of the subject, for example, over-stressing Pakhtuns' fighting capabilities and martial character, make it controversial. By doing this, the author brings the reader to a world of fantasy, away from real and natural settings.

This stereotypical approach, devoid of objective reality and leading, ultimately, to reductionism, continues till this day. Subsequently, other writers and historians, even the indigenous, followed suit unthinkingly (Khan, 2008). For example, Ghani Khan's book *The Pathan* (1948) is a poetic description of the valor and courage of the ideal Pakhtun. It seems unusual that such a great philosopher is describing contemporary people in the light of a history woven in myths and half-truths.

This debate has adopted a renewed and more intense momentum in the backdrop of the 9/11 terrorist attack, where Pakhtuns have suddenly found themselves in a difficult situation. A noticeable corollary of this is that the difference between the militants and the civilians is blurred. There is a danger of considering the whole ethnic community, either active militants or their passive supporters.

The second school of thought argues that ideas and culture should not be viewed as autonomous but embedded in complex material and institutional arrangements (Snyder, 2002). Culture alone cannot account for behavior at the international level. Culture shapes and is shaped by a particular environment, material circumstances, institutional settings, and strategic choices or options. Pakhtun's culture is no exception in this regard. Proponents of this perspective argue that Pakhtuns cultural values have no extremist elements. They consider Pakhtuns as essentially peace-loving. This view is mainly held by the two Pakhtun nationalist parties, the ANP (Awami National Party) (the ANP won 10 seats for National Assembly in 2008 general elections and also formed government in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), and the PMAP (Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party), mainly based in Balochistan but also has a considerable following in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA. The two parties have a declared policy of rooting out every kind of extremism and terrorism even through the use of force.

Those who hold this view proudly cite the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement (Servants of God) in support of their argument. Led by Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan (Bacha Khan), this is one practical demonstration of peaceful movement and non-violence. Together with religious principles, Bacha Khan used Pakhtun cultural traits of courage, bravery, honor, and uprightness for a totally different cause, that of the non-violent movement against the British. Giving a practical shape to the organization of non-violent movement, Ghafar Khan created a unique army, probably the world's first unarmed army. More than 100000 followers of Bacha Khan would be dressed and disciplined like an army, but they never carried arms nor used violent means to achieve their objectives (Khan, 1969). Starting in 1929, for more than two decades, the Servants of God demonstrated to the world that the Pakhtuns are capable of taking constructive actions and that too by using non-violent means. Aware of the potential for mass mobilization in the movement, the colonial administration dealt it with an iron hand. Many of its leaders, including Bacha Khan, were jailed. Hundreds of its activists were tortured, killed or even beaten to death. For example, in a single incident at Kissa Khwani in Peshawar on 23 April 1930, over 200 Khudai Khidmatgar members were shot dead who came to welcome a Congress Committee (Banerjee, 2000). Yet with all the atrocities against its leaders and other members, there was not even a single incidence where people had resorted to violence or armed resistance. "No matter how successful Pashtun sniper and guerilla tactics seems to be, superior British

power could always be brought in to punish the Pashtuns further” (Johansen, 1997: p. 58). It was a totally different strategy - non-violent organization and peaceful resistance by the Khudai Khidmatgars together with the Indian Nationalist Movement – which finally compelled the British to retreat (Johansen, 1997).

Pakhtuns commitment to non-violence and peaceful organization can be gauged from the oath that the Khudai Khidmatgars took at the time of their recruitment. They pledged:

- I am a Servant of God, and as God needs no service, but serving His creation is serving Him, I promise to serve humanity in the name of God.
- I promise to refrain from violence and from taking revenge.
- I promise to forgive those who oppress me or treat me with cruelty.
- I promise to refrain from taking part in feuds and quarrels and from creating enmity.
- I promise to treat every Pathan as my brother and friend.
- I promise to refrain from antisocial customs and practices.
- I promise to live a simple life, to practice virtue and to refrain from evil.
- I promise to practice good manners and good behavior and not to lead a life of idleness.
- I promise to devote at least two hours a day to social work. (Ghafar Khan, 1969: p. 97)

In fact, it is very difficult to prove a causal relationship between terrorism, and the Pakhtun cultural values from the available literature since so little has been written on the subject. Instead, if we hypothesize that the Pakhtun culture has no extremist tendencies but that it was a combination of state intervention, due to its strategic interests, and a stereotype and essentializing approach towards the Pakhtuns, coupled with major events at the international level like the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan which paved the way for the radicalization of the Pakhtun society, can we find abundant literature.

The Talibanization of Pakistan and the rise of religious extremism in the country can be attributed to a wide range of internal and external political dynamics, including the cold war, the Saur Revolution in Afghanistan, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the process of Islamization initiated in Pakistan by General Muhammad Zia ul Haq, and the civil war and the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan (Marwat, 2005). It also has much to do with the Pakistani army policies, like the mullah-military alliance and the covert role of the security agencies, and the dynamics of Pak-US relations (Abbas, 2005; Hussain, 2007). The Pakistani intelligence agencies, in connivance with the CIA, played a leading role in creating, training and equipping different militant groups to wage a guerrilla war in Afghanistan and Kashmir (Rashid, 2008).

Pakhtuns are thus caught in terrorism and the war on terror only because of their geography, which has long been used by the Pakistani state for activities inside Afghanistan, to seek the so-called “strategic depth” as a result of its threat perception from India. Moreover, the Taliban are a remnant of the former mujahideen, who were jointly recruited, trained and equipped by the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, including assistance from China and some European states to fight the Soviet army in Afghanistan in the 1980s (Rashid, 2000). Pakistan acquired an unmatched position in Afghan affairs when the US left the region after the defeat of the Red Army. On the one hand, it vigorously pursued its objective to seek a friendly regime in Kabul through the help of its home-grown jihadis and on the other hand, it turned a blind eye to the mujahedeen activities inside its own territory. Thus in the process, Pakhtun areas had become a safe haven for all the regional and international jihadis. It was after the attack of 9/11 that the world rediscovered the region. In the backdrop of this attack, the US launched its global campaign against terrorism, and Pakistan reluctantly withdrew its support of the Taliban regime in Kabul and started a military operation against the militants on this side of the border.

Social Engineering in the Pakhtun Society

Before analyzing social engineering in the Pakhtun society, we need to know what Social Engineering is.

Social Engineering

Christopher Hadnagy defines social engineering as “the act of manipulating a person to take an action that may or may not be in the “target’s” best interest. This may include obtaining information, gaining access, or getting the target to take certain action” (2011, p. 11).

Adam Podgorecki, Jon Alexander and Rob Shield concisely explain it. According to them, “social engineering means arranging and channelling environmental and social forces to create a high probability that effective social action will occur” (1996, p. 1).

The advent of social engineering is closely associated with the rise of the nation state. The state, through its institutions and specialized agencies, embarked on major interventions in the society in the name of strategy, national interest, social order, and morality. State activities increasingly expanded by engulfing wider areas of social life, from checking certain social trends up to determining standards of behavior. However, it should be noted that social engineering is not totally dependant on the state alone. It also takes place at the micro-level. It is not only top-down but also bottoms up (Podgorecki, Alexander & Shield, 1996).

France presented a perfect example of social engineering at the close of the eighteenth century. State activities in France even included efforts to change earlier and strongly held religious beliefs and ceremonies. Elsewhere in Europe, Marxism provided the greatest inspiration to social engineering in the nineteenth century. Marxism encouraged revolutionary reconstruction on a global scale. British historian Paul Johnson (1983), however, termed the twentieth century as the age of social engineering (as cited in Podgorecki, Alexander & Shield, 1996). The twentieth century’s great social engineers who changed facts on a global scale were all dictators, Lenin, Stalin and Hitler. This process of social engineering ended in Europe at mid-century but continued in Asia and Africa, mainly in China, but also Cambodia and the Middle East. Americans abhor the word social engineering as, according to them, it applies to dictators. Critics argue otherwise and believe that the US itself is increasingly leading its society to a world of new forms of social engineering based upon motivational psychology and triggered by modern technology. However, most social engineering projects of the twentieth century met with failure, as “the material that social engineers use-human beings- is resistant. One cannot easily adjust this material to the designer’s end” (Podgorecki, Alexander & Shield, 1996, pp. 1-2).

All social engineers are utopians and moralists. They envision a future society and claim to have the necessary technical knowledge to achieve what is good and eliminate what is bad. Institutions run by these utopians that sought to transform the societies often move in unpredictable directions, unforeseen by the members. For example, engineering in culture to move it in the desired direction may produce culture counter-projects (Snyder, 2002). The interplay of three factors, utopia or an idealist vision of the future, power of the state or other institution, and masses, produce dangerous implications. Without powerful intermediate social structures between the masses and the state, individual stand-alone and unprotected before the rulers. Social engineers, when unhindered, may fabricate reality. They may camouflage their real intentions. Often the intelligence agencies do this to redirect the attention from what is needed or essential. Furthermore, this process of social change is not fully controllable; it has its own dynamics. No one may want or even notice what is happening.

There are two main forms of social engineering; piecemeal and utopian social engineering. In piecemeal form, a social engineer takes small steps, regularly correcting his moves. He does not envision a total transformation of the social system. While a utopian social engineer wants a total transformation of society. He knows in advance what ought to be done and what is bad enough to be eliminated (Podgorecki, Alexander & Shield, 1996).

Social Engineering and the Pakhtun Culture

Pakhtun culture has been distorted due to reductionism and social engineering. When the groundwork was done through a process of image or perception-building, the stage was set for a possible social change.

A contemporary image of the Pakhtuns has largely been shaped by the stereotypical approach in the historical literature and the resultant myopic policies by the British colonial administration. The British had adopted this approach as part of the colonialists' project of treating the indigenous people as 'Others'. This was the strategy that they used not only to justify their occupation but also their inhuman treatment of the subject population. "When Other is not only dehumanized but has been successfully converted into an 'it', deprived of manhood, the stage is set for any type of direct violence, which is then blamed on the victim" (Galtung, 1990, p. 298). From this perspective, Pakhtuns suffered from double "Otherization". In line with the colonial outlook,

Not only were they an undervalued mass peasantry who were deemed incapable of constructive political action by their own (or at least the Indian) bourgeoisie; they were also as Pathans, the victims of particularly extreme orientalist representations, which portrayed them as far more hotheaded and unpredictable than even the average Indian peasant. (Banerjee, 2000, p. 13)

When this policy of attributing myths and stereotypes was successful, the rest was relatively easy. Social engineering in the Pakhtuns' region in the form of religious indoctrination of the youth and inculcation of a reactionary, militant, and jihadist culture in the society, started with the April 1978 revolution and the subsequent Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Since its independence, Pakistan had to bear with a formidable enemy in the shape of India on its eastern border. It was obvious that Pakistan did not want turbulence on other borders. The communists' revolution of 1978 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan were bound to have implications for Pakistan's strategic policy. Even before that, there were two factors that compelled Pakistan to intervene in Afghan affairs. The first was the search for a military or strategic depth in the shape of a friendly regime in Afghanistan, and the second was the Pakhtunistan issue. In fact, the two were interrelated in that a friendly regime would not take up the Pakhtunistan issue to irritate Islamabad (Marwat, 2005). So even before the Communist intervention, Pakistan had started training certain Afghan dissidents against the Communist government in Kabul (Gul, 2009).

The conscious policy of manipulation and engineering started, however, with the influx of refugees after the April revolution and the Soviet occupation. Most of the refugees were concentrated in camps in the tribal area and in and around Peshawar. They were divided into seven Tanzimot parties based on their political inclinations and religious beliefs. Everything was strictly monitored by the Pakistani military through its secret agencies. Funds coming from the United States and other Middle Eastern countries were channelled to these groups through the hands of these secret agencies. The distribution of the funds was not uniform. The process was covertly manipulated by the concerned authorities (Marwat, 2005). The bulk of these funds and other resources went to Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbadin Hikmatyar, an orthodox, Sunni, Hanafi group, considered as Pakistan's closest ally.

The distinction was made between a muhajir (refugee) and a mujahid (holy warrior). As every mujahid was a muhajir but every muhajir was not a mujahid. The mujahideen were to fight the Soviet army in Afghanistan. Subsequently, they were trained and equipped with modern weapons to prepare them for the war (Rashid, 2008). Jihadi literature was created and disseminated to galvanize the people to support the war cause morally, financially, and logistically. Furthermore, jihadis from around the world were encouraged to come and fight the "infidels".

The process was backed by a network of madrassas or religious schools throughout the country but especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA. About one thousand madrassas and Dar-ul-Ulum were established in the country. Money coming from the Middle Eastern countries or the so-called petro-dollars was funnelled to these madrassas. Rs. 15969 million were distributed amongst forty-two madrassas alone from 1985 to 1991. Stress was on the jihadi content so as to produce more and more jihadis. These madrassas also hosted thousands of foreign students from other Islamic countries who were instrumental in the Afghan jihad (Marwat, 2005).

Some of the religious institutions established by the Afghan refugee's parties themselves were the following:

- Madrassa Hijrat aw Jihad (Seminary of Emigration and Holy War)
- Da'wat wa Jihad Pohantoon (the University of Islamic Propagation and Holy war)
- Madrassa Abu Hanifa
- SyedJamal-ud-DinAfghaniSchool
- Dar-ul-Hufaz Madrassa (For memorizing of Holy Quran)
- Uminat-ul-Mumineen (Mothers of the Believers) for female students.

The most dangerous of all these manipulating strategies and the one which had implications for the future was that regarding the school children. Schools were set up for the Afghan refugees' children, run by different UN specialized agencies like the UNHCR, other NGOs, and political parties like the Jamat-e-Islami. Strict indoctrination of militant Islamic ideology was the main purpose of these schools. Textbooks that were published in the US included much unnecessary material designed for ideological propaganda (Gul, 2009). For example, the mathematics books included problems such as:

If out of 10 infidels, 5 were killed by 1 Muslim, 5 would be left. $5 \text{ guns} + 5 \text{ guns} = 10 \text{ guns}$. $15 \text{ bullets} - 10 \text{ bullets} = 5 \text{ bullets}$ etc. (Marwat, 2005, p. 34).

It should be mentioned here that most, if not all, of these activities, were taking place on the Pakhtuns' soil and bound to have implications for society in the future. For example, firstly, madrassas set up in the region were not limited to the Afghan refugees alone. In fact, the majority of the students enrolled in these madrassas belonged to FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The number of these madrassas has increased over the years, and currently, there are over 20000 religious seminaries in the country (Mir, 2009). The important thing is that these madrassas have not brought about any significant changes in the curriculum. Money, coming from abroad, is still channelled to these madrassas. Thus, the Afghan war is no more there, but a constant supply of mujahideen has been unhindered. Madrassas have been set up along sectarian lines. As a result, there are separate madrassas for Sunnis and Shias. Even further demarcation has been made within Sunnis and Shias. Groups like Deobandis, Bareilvis, and Ahl al-Hadith have their own religious schools. Hate speeches, directed against each other, have been instrumental in the wave of sectarian violence in the region for the last three decades. Secondly, Pakhtun society has become militarized. Apart from the concentration of heavy weaponry in FATA, the Kalashnikov (AK 47) culture has engulfed the entire settled region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A house without a Kalashnikov can hardly be found even in the urban areas. And thirdly, drug trafficking and illegal trade in goods and arms have hindered healthy economic activities.

Moreover, the process of manipulation and social engineering was not confined to the refugees' camps alone. Zia ul Haq, through the process of Islamization, embarked upon a vigorous policy to transform the society. Major reforms were introduced in the legal and constitutional system of the country. The parliament was renamed as Majlis-e-Shoora, and laws deemed repugnant to the Islamic Shariah were either amended or abolished. Government official was appointed not on merit but on their credentials of being practical Muslims. Five-time prayer was made compulsory in all the departments of the government, and the Islamic curriculum in the educational system was given a renewed attention (Abbas, 2005). Through a well thought out strategy, the role of armed forces in the country was strengthened, and the pluralistic voice of the people was silenced. The madrassa certificate or Sanad was made equivalent to the university degree, which brought the religious forces from the periphery to the mainstream politics of the country. Hudood Ordinance was passed to effect Islamic sentences for major crimes (Marwat, 2005).

Through this combination of religion and politics, the Islamic groups gained more leverage against the political forces.

Conclusion

A review of the literature reveals there are two views regarding the issue at hand. The first school of thought holds that socialization in a peculiar culture setting set the stage for a would-be terrorist. The second does not see any possible co-relation between culture and terrorism. Further, a thorough investigation of the

Pakhtun culture establishes the fact that there is no structured violence in it. Therefore it can be concluded from the preceding discussion that the Pakhtun culture has nothing to do with militancy, Talibanization, and terrorism. The current terrorism on the Pakhtun land is largely a product of a historic policy of image distortion of the Pakhtuns, external environment, and a conscious policy of social engineering. In a nutshell, the Afghan war and the policy of social engineering carried out by the state brought about a negative social change in the society, which surfaced after 9/11.

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