

## Militancy and its Implications in the Tribal Belt of Pakistan



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### Abstract

*The objective of this study is to examine militancy and its implications in erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which was annexed to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018. The people of erstwhile FATA become victims of militancy and armed conflict for a number of reasons. However, the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 led to the rising of militancy in the tribal belt of Pakistan, which adversely affected the region, its people and their way of living economically, socially, culturally and psychologically. The paper concludes that the in-time action of the government put this region on the path of peace and stability. The merger of FATA to KP was a significant act the government did in 2018 that has a far-reaching impact on peace in the area. The article suggests the best possible and viable options to reduce the suffering of tribal people in all domains.*

**Key Words:** Armed Conflict, Militancy, Tribal Belt, Erstwhile FATA, Non-State Actors

### Introduction

The geo-strategic location of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is of immense importance in the region. It is directly connected with Afghanistan in the west, which holds a clear way to that of Central Asian Republics and the Middle East as well. The continuous efforts of maintaining its hegemony (major powers) indicated the values of these regions, which is being under threat due to other developments in various parts of the world. FATA is a tribal region, which lies in north and east to the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province while Baluchistan in South and to west: a neighboring country Afghanistan. It consists of seven tribals districts: Bajur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North and South Waziristan.

The merger of FATA into KP province by PTI led government has changed the whole scenario. The Law-and-order situation will now be preserved, which is the biggest achievement by the government. The FATA region has always remained a core centre for every major power in every era. During the 19th century, it remained a vital segment of the “Great Game” between Russia and Great Britain. To curb Russian expansionism in the region became essential for British hegemony, for which it was necessary to take control over the tribal belt of the sub-continent at that time.

FATA has always been prone to instability. To enhance its influence, the British adopted various policies, which ultimately affected the region with armed interventions. In order to seek its promulgation and to have its influence and control, Britain introduced Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) for giving autonomous status to the region. Since then, until the merger of FATA with KP province in 2017, the region is governed by the laws and rules mentioned in the FCR presented by Great Britain.

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The US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 brought many challenges for Pakistan. The main fallout on Pakistan was of terrorism and extremism that thrived in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) immediately after the US invasion. Many militants' groups started operating in the area and challenged the government writ. Besides, it expanded to the settled areas where suicide bombing remained a routine and greatly disturbed the peaceful environment. The growth of non-state actors was mounting leaps and bounds that greatly disturbed the tribals. This article aims at analyzing the factors that contributed to the spread of militancy in the tribal belt and how did it affect the area in a number of ways. The measures taken by the government has also been taken into account.

### **FATA at a Glance**

Since the inception of Pakistan, FATA has remained a peaceful region. People were living their life with simplicity among their loved ones. It was famous for the hospitality and features of *Pakhtunwali*. Entertain tourists and guests was one of their favourite hobbies. The area is blessed with natural beauty and clean drinking water. Once, people from far-flung areas used to visit due to its history, geo-strategic location and its beauty. To follow their culture and tradition was their topmost priority. Freedom for social activities existed due to living off the same tribe in nearby areas.

The area is not rich. Most of the houses were constructed of mud material. Living in a joint family system was a common trend practice. Families used to live in one large compound altogether. Some of the families used to have separate kitchens despite living in one compound. The majority of the people owned their own house, and those who were not having own home had to live in a rented home but on a very low cost. People did not have to pay the utility bills as they did there was no natural gas nor electricity. Additionally, Tribal belt of Pakistan, is a cooler area, therefore people did not care about the electricity.

Males only worked as a labour either in agricultural lands or through on daily waging for income generation. They were free from other duties as compared to females. They spend most of the afternoons under the shed of the tree. Males used to work in other cities as a labour. Due to lack of unemployment, one of the third of the household was having a male member working abroad, mostly in Persian Gulf for generating good income. They lived smoothly because of same tribe living in one area does not restrain the movement of the females for any social or economic activity.

Females on the other hand were spending a tough time but at the same time, they used to enjoy as it was an excuse for their refreshment. Additionally, they always have shown cooperation with their male members for the support of their own family. However, life for females was difficult as compare to the life of the males. Females along with household chores had to fulfill task outside home such as fetching water from the river and springs, getting and cutting firewood in orchards for cooking purposes, washing clothes near the streams and rivers, working in the fields for cultivation and harvesting of crops. At the same time, they also used to take of their children etc. They were living in freedom. Females could go out of homes for labour work in farming lands. Interestingly, those females who possessed their own land used to work in their own fields. Additionally, most of the women were working in the lands of others to help her family in fulfilling their basic necessities of life.

Cultural acceptance could be observed as there were no strict rules in the nearby areas. Traditional dresses were commonly worn by both males and females. Pashto is the common language spoken across the region. Women could go out easily for social gatherings. They were also amazed by the labour work as these females considered it as a source of enjoyment. They shared their day to day to life with each other during tea break as well as during lunch break. Males, on the other side, were also busy generating some income through their engagement in labour work along with females.

Boys were encouraged to be enrolled in school but in the areas where schools were available nearby. Mostly, boys were also enrolled in labour work when they used to cross their age limit of fifteen years. Additionally, Girl's education was not that common due to the unavailability of schools, but it is interesting to know that girls were enrolled in schools till primary, where schools existed, especially in Bara. Girl's used to going to school in a group form and would follow the same pattern in the off-time, where schools were available, and the same follows for the boys. Some of the schools were not located nearby homes; therefore, most of them had to travel by for hours and hours. Far distances to schools are one of the main factors of girl's education till primary.

Any conflict or issues in the village, whether among families or individuals, were solved through Jirga. It is the traditional way of solving any conflict among or between the tribes, people and families. The Jirga takes the decision according to the Pashtun tradition and culture. The solution is given by the elder of the Jirga, who is usually the Malik of the area. *Jirga* is practised in rural areas across Pakistan, such as southern Punjab and Baluchistan, with different names such as *Panchayat* in Punjabi and *Jirga* in Pashto.

### Rise of Militancy/Terrorism

The 9/11 incident and Afghanistan's invasion have shrugged the peaceful coexistence of Pakistan with particular reference to KP. Pakistan, being the neighbour of Afghanistan, has provided full support in the "Global War on terror" which was initiated by President George Bush in order to eliminate terrorism from the region. On the other hand, Pakistan had to pay a huge amount as many of the networks related to AL-Qaeda have started to reside in the tribal belt of Pakistan for seeking protection. This is a landmark questioned that has no answer yet that whether militancy in KP was a strategy planned by the US to have control over the region. Here, the question is that since independence, why only the tribal belt of Pakistan has to become the core centre for militancy and terrorism.

There could be some factors involved which lead to rising of militancy in the region:

### Great Game

Erstwhile, FATA (currently tribal districts) has always remained the epic centre for every emerging power in every era. The tribal belt of Pakistan, previously known as FATA, was once the core area of the battle during the Great Game between Great Britain and Russia in the nineteenth century ([Fromkin, 1980](#)). This territory was used for universal expansionism during the 19th century. British considered as essential to have control over the region for their Indian control, to be used versus the Soviet domination in Central Asia. However, the British found it difficult to leave its impact. Hence British colonial expansionism was observed, but it did not have its full control due to hiring of agents and consent of local tribes and consent of local tribal leaders. The local populace was managing and governing internal affairs on the basis of tribal codes, while the 'protected' and 'administered' areas were managed under authority of colonial administration as over-all stuff linked to the security of British India ([Global Security, 2011](#)).

### Use of Non-State Actors

To attain the foreign objects through the use of non-state actors is a leading factor of militancy. A resident of FATA by tradition are very religious, which could be very easily exploited at the hands of others. They could go deep in the name of religion. Hence religious exploitation became the hallmark of foreign vested interests.

### Role of Tribal Elders

The law-and-order situation of FATA was shaped with the code of Malik's and Tribal elders. Residents of the region are believed to be strong followers of these elders. Before the rise of militancy, these Malik's and Mullahs played a role in the cohesion of local masses. However,

militants in the very first stage targeted these elders and Malik's to destroy the command-and-control system of the region. Then these militants provided handsome incentives to poor people to join the files, including monthly pay, good food, security and a false sense of superiority achieved through terror ([Malik, 2013](#): 104-108).

### **Governance**

Negligence and lack of government policies and a proper administrative system also added a large portion to the rise of militancy in the region. The area was run by the elders or Malik's and through political agents. The areas also lacked the law-and-order situation, for which it was difficult for the security agencies to identify and address the issue easily. The administrative system was purely based on an autonomous system of the region, primarily based on culture.

### **Geo-strategic Location**

FATA is blessed with an important geo-strategic location. To contain the developmental initiative taken by Pakistan with several other countries is also one of the policies adopted by the major powers, which was only possible through the spread of militancy. FATA is the region, which is having direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, in which major powers do have their stakes for political and economic reasons.

### **Cold War**

Pakistan adopted a policy to join hands with the USA during USSR intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 have also paved the way for militancy. Trainings to mujahidin's and Taliban's by the USA in cooperation with Pakistan in order to curb the USSR expansionism in the country. To train these mujahidin did not only have its effect on Afghanistan but on the tribal belt of Pakistan as most of these had to seek shelter in this particular region due to access through border sharing.

### **Foreign Militants**

The settlement of foreign militants such as Uzbeks, Arabs and Czech since Afghan Jihad is also one of the key elements of the rise of militancy. These foreign militants further got married to the local women for it prolongs settlement and to be more secure. These foreign militants are easily provoked by foreign agencies and used in achieving their objectives in Pakistan.

### **Poverty**

Poverty is another main reason which fuels militancy. Approximately 60% of its population lives below the poverty line. Agriculture is the only source of income. Most of the people work in the lands of others and in return they get some goods in the shape of crops and vegetables. They are prone to fewer opportunities due to a lack of facilities in the region.

### **Low Literacy Rate**

Lack of education, illiteracy and ignorance also provide grounds for bringing people easily towards militancy. FATA is a very complex region, education facilities are available, but before the military operation, it was difficult to find educational facilities in rugged terrain such as Tirrah valley with special context to girl's education.

### **Lack of Employment Opportunities**

Despite being the centre of attraction, FATA remained under-developed. Due to the negligence of the government, the people of this area had very few opportunities for work. Labour and agricultural farming were the main source of income. The poorest families could easily fall into the hands of these militants to feed their families. Younger boys, due to early engagement in labour work, could not continue their studies continue. They were compelled to work in order to feed their families.

## Survival Fatigues

During the study, I came out to the consensus despite the other factors, one of the main factors which most of us ignores is that the innocent male members were forced to join the militant's groups as their families were under threat. Being weak, these people were compelled to save their families from torture and chaos.

## Government's Role

It is not easy to eliminate the germs of militancy from the region. The Government of Pakistan, with the help of the military, played a key role in dismantling militants. Pakistan's establishment had taken several steps. Governments of Pakistan established a National Action Plan comprised of 20 clauses. They also organized all parties' conference in which special invitation was given to the leaders of the militant group for bringing peace and prosperity to the region. They also launched a military operation with the name of Operation Zarbe-Azab against the militants as a last resort. For a responsible establishment, it's not easy to put their people into trouble, but however, they were compelled too.

However, residents with propagating the agenda of non-state actors with the slogans against the government and military have given a boost to the spread to terrorism with the rise of local militants. This was tactically used to pressurize the establishment for restraint of the military operations for vested interest of various countries and groups. Despite the hidden agendas of non-state actors, government of Pakistan was successful in eliminating terrorism from the region.

## Impact of Militancy

Creation of insurgencies affects the life of the people negatively, particularly residents. It's a human who suffers for no gain. Militancy had not only filled the KP region with chaos and violence, but it has severely affected the life of the residents of FATA. These poor people were restricted to live life according to the extremists. Male members of the family were forced to join their forces and to accompany them in spreading terror. Female's lives were restricted to homes only. Free movement in FATA was restricted.

In the initial phase, there was no income generation for these poor people. Ban on females was put on from working in farming lands while males were forced to work for these militant groups in different dimensions. After the negotiations of locals with leaders of these groups, these females were then allowed to continue their outside chores but in a strict *parda* system. One of the male members quoted during the meeting that "we have two options either to join your forces or either we work to earn for fulfilling the basic needs" (Karamadad, 2016). Permission was granted to allow females to work in the fields but with restriction to wear a Shuttle Cock Burqa during farming. However, there was no specific rule of wearing a Burqa before the rise of militancy, especially during work. Wearing this traditional Burqa has led to many injuries due to difficulty faced in their movement (Normally, walking in Shuttle Cock is not difficult); It is problematic during work.

One does not have words to explain the sufferings and the sorrows faced by the locals of the FATA. According to the local resident of FATA, they lived a peaceful life before the occurrence of terrorism. Their life was filled with joy and happiness. During an interview, a female said that "before the terrorism, we were living in our own native lands. Complete peace was destroyed by the rise of militancy". (Bibi Jauhar, 2016). The region was already suffering lack of employment opportunities and poverty while militancy added more. People would show reluctance in coming out of their homes due to fear. Educational, cultural and social activities as a whole were affected badly.

## Socio-Cultural Impact

The word cope is very easy to say but to act on its concept mechanism is difficult. The phase of

transformation from living in peace to face chaos and violence is unbearable. The single agenda of militancy have shrunk the whole area. Every region within the state has their own culture, consisting of its norms and traditions. Unique culture exists, and this is the reason that some of the countries support interstate and intrastate-cultural exchange programs. The region of tribal is also famous for its unique culture, norms and traditions; It is filled with simplicity. Females were supposed to follow strict purdah procedures even in their work time. In an interview, one of the females said that “Injuries occurred during working in fields. *Burqa* was made necessary to wear even in our work time due to which we used to face problem in our movement. Many of us would often fall” ([Bibi Asia, 2016](#)). We faced several injuries while fetching water from the river, or getting firewood for cooking purposes and also during getting fodder for the live stocks which we kept. That is all due to covering ourselves with a huge sheet of Shuttle Cock *Burqa*. On the other hand, males could not stand up as they feared massive cruelty and brutality by militants ([Bibi Yasin, 2016](#)).

The social activities have only been confined to the homes of the poor ladies. Men and gentle young adults were forced to join militant groups. According to one of the residents, “You cannot even imagine our pain. On one side, we had to save our families, and on the other side, we were supposed to bow down our heads in front of the militants. Those who refused were tortured both mentally and physically. Even their homes were put to fire” ([Jan 2016](#)). Happiness was transformed into bloodshed, and a ban on social activities was imposed indirectly. The movement of the residents was made difficult, especially of females, as they were abiding by wearing *Burqa*. Even living among their own tribe, she has to accompany by any male member if had to make a visit to a relative's home or for any social gatherings which was not to be practised before the rise of militancy.

The young generation of this region faced issues in getting their education, both boys and girls. Boys could not go due to fear of chaos where the ban was imposed on girl's education where the facility was available. To get religious education was allowed to these poor boys and girls. Even their social activities were banned. These poor children at times accompanied their elders in any of the activities. Due to the worsening of the situation and environment, each household had to keep one male member round the clock at home for the protection of their families. In most of the homes, there was one poor old lady acting as a protector of her entire family.

To do early marriages for both girls and boys was also one of their common trends. They preferred marrying girls at an early age due to cultural, economic and religious reasons. In areas like Bara, primary education was available, and the resident of those areas used to send their daughters to schools but not in the majority of areas. Educate their daughters also became a trend but in very limited areas. Due to poverty, the young boys were indulged in labour which became a blockade in their education, and while for females, it was their early marriages. In addition to this, as the area was suffering from poverty so due to the non-availability of resources, people could not send their boys for higher education.

To get Islamic education was a common trend practised even in female circles. For females, *Madrassa's* were arranged in homes where one female was providing religious education. For males, proper *Madrassas* (seminaries) were established. Mostly religious education was provided in local mosques. Religious education had immense importance. Comparatively, the people of this area are more religious than other areas. They considered their prime duty to provide religious education to their children.

### **Economic Impact**

Economics of any region is the main component for the survival of mankind. People, as well as states, do confine their goals, which are ultimately based on economic purposes. Similarly, was the practice of the poor people of FATA. These poor people had their own pre-defined goals on a daily basis. The conflict did not only leave the people with sorrow, but it resulted in leaving them empty-handed. Their economic activities were severely affected. This region was already a poor

region with no basic facilities, and it got more worsened due to chaos and terrorism. Militancy not only brought damage to their social life but to their sources of income also. Labour and agriculture farming was the only main source for income generation. Most of the families were having their own lands, which were used to crop and harvest by their own self. *Hashish* and *Charas* was their main agricultural crop and source of income. These families reside nearby agricultural lands where they could easily go and work. It was also one of the main sources of their interactions, especially for females who used to have fewer chances of meeting and having gossip with each other.

They also used to grow vegetables in the small compound either in their homes or in front of their homes. Moreover, the trend of keeping livestock also went into vain due to the spread of militancy. Families used to get fresh and pure milk, butter and yoghurt from these live stocks, which saved their amount of earnings. To sell eggs at some point could also add to their income generation. In more pre-defined words, their small businesses were also chopped down due to having difficulty in access to other people's homes. Male members of each family also worked outside the country, mostly in Gulf countries, for better income generation. None of the above-mentioned activities could be practised due to the rise of militancy, which led to the temporary displacement of these poor people. In order to eliminate terrorism, the government of Pakistan launched a military operation by the name of *Zarb-e-Azab*.

### Displacement

It was not easy to leave our native lands and our beloved houses ([Rasool, 2016](#)). Due to the prevalence of extensive militancy in the region of the tribal belt of Pakistan, Government launched a military operation against these terrorists, which led to the displacement of the residents of the region. These residents were asked to vacate the area in a peaceful manner. Before, launching of military operation, systematic warnings and ample time was given to the people. There were various methods adopted to inform people such announcements were made through loudspeakers, use of radio and informing people individually—these people then left their native land. The military operation led to psychological stress and trauma among the masses, especially women and children. Their lives were made miserable by the fear of death and bloodshed. ([Bari, 2010](#)).

According to one of the females, it was not easy to leave our homes, but we were compelled to leave, we left our homes while getting some necessary things, and some of us had started our journey empty-handed. We did not have any water, or food. Both male and females were moving in a mixed group. Due to non-availability of transportation we had to continuously even walk for several hours, areas where transport got available charged high fares from us and we were compelled to pay. To protect females during the journey became difficult for our males. Due to extensive walk, we had been facing skin issues and other medical hazards.

Interestingly in the way there were small shops whose owners were providing free shoes and staff as a sort of help. Military had arranged temporary shelters in the nearby city areas. These people were provided with shelter, food and other basic necessities. There were families who lived for a year in these tents. Proper *pardah* (veil) system for families was also maintained which was a big concern of these poor residents.

### Re-settlement

Pakistan government and its military along with other related departments acted as responsible institutions. Announcement of military operation was given on a short notice, and it was not easy for the residents to leave their homes and get settled in a completely different environment. Temporary shelters were arranged for Internal Displaced People (IDPs). Initially, most of them seek shelter at their relative's homes. They rented homes in the latter stages for their settlement as they could see no chance of going back to their native lands in the near future.

It was a very difficult moment for them to get settled in a new place and in a different environment. These people had taken loans from their relatives for settlement as they had to pay rent and utility bills which they were not paying in their own native land. Due to less purchasing power, big families were supposed to live in a small compound. "To get settled in an unfamiliar environment was difficult for us. Culture, norms and traditions were different. For us it was a very awkward situation" (Parveen, 2016).

Males who were not exposed to daily working were compelled to start working on daily wages in various forms for income generation. Now it became necessary for these males to fulfil all the responsibilities for maintaining a household, which they found difficult. Females who were exposed to outside chores were now limited to only household chores within the house boundary. On a lighter mode, these females felt relaxed as they had only the responsibility to look after their children and home.

However, change in the environment also resulted in a change of norms and values. Some old people still adopted their own culture and values in the new environment, but they were not able to sustain it due to the growing generation gap. The young generation will be groomed in the new place, new environment, not in their traditional habitat. Intra-marriages among completely different families other than tribes took place. Changes were not limited to marriages only, but there were other factors involved, transformation in dressing codes could also be observed. Despite all the changes, these families still adopted the *purdah* (veil) culture even in the new environment. The young generation who was not able to get an education due to lack of facilities could now easily avail their education. Girls who were only allowed to study till primary now had an opportunity to get higher education, but it was not brought into practice due to fears in the minds of the elders of fighting for their women rights.

It was interesting to know that most of the young females did not want to return to their homeland after peace was brought into their own region. They were of the view that we will have performed all those chores which we used to practice before militancy. The old ladies were desperately waiting for the time of going back to their own native land for spending the rest of their life. Males, both young and old, wanted it to return as the area after the military operation has gained economic momentum, and the government, along with the military, had promised to provide every facility which was not available some years ago.

## Conclusion

Edward Newman, a weak state "refers to a situation where the central government has a poor capacity to control public order within its territory, is unable to consistently control its borders, cannot reliably maintain viable institutions or services, and is vulnerable to extra-constitutional domestic challenge" explains (Newman, 2007). The geo-strategic location of Pakistan in general and the Tribal belt, in particular, is the core reason for the attention and interest of other states. Sharing of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan have escalated the insurgency. For militants, it is easy to seek to save shelter in the Middle Eastern region via Afghanistan. The state intends to indulge in wars forgets the cost of the suffering of human life and human resource. It's not only the loss of human lives but an overall impact on their living. Why these innocent people had to suffer? What do they get out of all this? It's the state interest only. To bring peace and prosperity to the life of the people, United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) had to take some fruitful steps for curbing insurgencies posed by the countries in various regions. The government of Pakistan and the military had performed at their best in bringing peace into the tribal belt of Pakistan. Roads, hospitals, schools, and sports have been constructed for these poor people. Efforts have been made in different domains to uplift socio-economic activities besides a better security environment. Moreover, the merger of FATA into the KP region will bring a drastic change in the old administration system, which will bring new economic opportunities, proper law and order situation and more investments into the region. The new system will also ensure the availability of basic amenities ranging from security to political and economic aspects.



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