

EXTERNAL FACTORS OF INSTABILITY IN PAKISTAN – TROUBLED ALLIANCES IN WAR

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Introduction

Boasting as many 'firsts' as it is guilty of, Pakistan has been in the limelight for a significant part of its short history. This has been especially true since the events of September 11, 2001 have placed it in the midst of a war that continues to dominate headlines nine years later. An extensive colonial history, cultural richness, and religious and ethnic diversities have made it the exotic Asian land that has enamoured sociologists and travellers, academics and historians alike. A land of the magical, unattainable tribal regions, of devotional songs and eroticized poetry, it remained a classic orientalist dream. This image has increasingly and perhaps inevitably in this age of globalization, given way to drier phenomena surrounding political dynamics, terrorism, religious fundamentalism and nuclear capability. It has remained a region of interest, and a country that remains in the spotlight, but the historians, sociologists and cultural enthusiasts have been replaced by nuclear and political analysts, military leaders, strategic thinkers and politicians.

This is unfortunate, but also unsurprising. Global dynamics have necessitated a shift in policy matters, and since the attacks on the U.S. in 2001, a fight against terrorism has dominated headlines, understandably since it has been carried out on an unprecedented scale. This 'war on terror' has seen the country become immensely important strategically – a frontline State in the battle against extremism. However, internal and external factors continue to test Pakistan's resolve as a viable State with several crises engulfing it. While no stranger to political, social and economic imbalances, the complex nature of current turmoil has caused concern that 'muddling through' is no longer a possibility. The crises are not all self-acquired; external effects also hinder development goals, affecting the stability of the country.

Stability is a typically useful vague concept that serves the purpose of such a discourse. For Pakistan, contextually, it is used to refer to political, rather than economic and social dimensions. With terrorism a burning issue of late, this tendency has only risen in the last few years. Pakistan has in the last decade been declared a 'failed state' and labelled the most dangerous nation in the world - assertions that led to angry reactions and vehement criticism, perhaps justifiably so, from indignant patriots who saw these as exaggerated claims of incognizant foreign observers. However, it is testament to how quickly and radically things change that any analysis even by the most patriotic of elements cannot now deny that current instabilities have pushed the country to the brink.

Unprecedented crises today combine the social and political with the economic and ideological, and cannot be viewed unidimensionally. However, for any multifaceted issue, it becomes almost necessary to deconstruct the argument and take various pieces of the puzzle separately. Indeed, given the inherent complexity of the subject, it becomes a risky challenge for academics and policy-makers alike. This study attempts to assess some of the most important factors behind instability in Pakistan that come through due to its strategic, geopolitical and ideological position and relate primarily to relations with other countries. Essentially, Pakistan's relationship with the U.S. and Afghanistan is analysed to show how 'external' factors arising from the latter two, add to instability in the former.

It is imperative at the outset to clarify the context of instability. While 9/11 became a watershed in the treatment and global perceptions of terrorism, it also unwittingly came to define militancy and consequently instability in Pakistan. The complete picture is more complex as the roots of militancy fall within a much larger sphere of time and space. In this study, instability is taken to relate to issues of militancy and acts of terrorism but also wider social and ideological concerns that play their part in causing extremism to prevail. These issues have exacerbated in recent times and we see an unparalleled and unprecedented rise in militancy and terrorist incidents, both in 'speed and spread'. And if external factors are involved, they require detailed and careful analyses since the policy implications arising from them are more complicated.

The study itself comes at an opportune time for two reasons. Firstly, adequate scholarship of such external factors and national instability is still embryonic at best and is necessary if roots rather than symptoms of problems are to be tackled. Secondly, both internal and external factors that drive Pakistan's policy environment are currently in the public eye, as are the institutional and political imbalances in view of rising terrorism. Myopic analyses of correlations prevent adequate examination of deeper implications within each variable – in this case, the reasons for instability or terrorism.

For instance, if militant groups are an established variable, we need to understand if those in Pakistan feed off from those in Afghanistan; in case of alliances, public perceptions need to be studied; and if socio-economic conditions are a variable, then aid issues also require attention.

This paper will therefore attempt to examine facets within two key relationships that have dominated Pakistani foreign policy since 9/11. While forming a trident in the war with United States and Afghanistan, some de-linking into bilateral frameworks is necessary to assess the contention that external factors have led to a significant rise of instability in Pakistan.

United States and Pakistan

Pakistan's strained and unpopular, if also strategically necessary, relationship with the United States is a persistent and prominent factor of current instability. What began in the post-9/11 era as an alliance in the war on terror has had numerous dimensions as the country is entangled in ideological dilemmas and considered to be fighting an American war. Pakistan and the U.S. share a special relationship that has had numerous highs and lows. Many have argued that this is a fair-weather friendship that has served U.S. interests.

Much has also been written about the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s, the alliance then between Pakistan and the U.S., the creation and empowerment of the Taliban, and a premature withdrawal of the U.S. This has caused considerable damage to the relationship between the two countries and developed a collective memory not just among the masses, which is dangerous enough, but also mistrust at the highest levels of decision-making. Yet, by acknowledging past mistakes, responsibility of the consequences for Afghanistan and Pakistan has belatedly been accepted by the U.S. as it seeks to vindicate itself through a better end to the current war.

Political and military dimensions have been discussed in detail, but much less understood are the intangible social and economic consequences of the previous Afghan war. What is generally addressed somewhat dismissively as the 'refugee problem' has seen massive social ramifications including smuggling, drugs and the 'Kalashnikov culture'. By no means minor issues, they require adequate attention when

studying the effects on Pakistan due to its foreign policy vis-à-vis the U.S. But in view of more immediate and tangible concerns, they have remained sidelined. What takes precedence is the war on terror and other facets of the current relationship, including aid issues and mutual mistrust that play a part in destabilising the country.

War and terror

Since the events of September 11, Pakistan has had to carve out a new strategy for its future. An alliance with the U.S. has seen a turbulent decade of war against terrorist groups – namely, the Al Qaeda and Taliban, but as far as Pakistan has been concerned, it includes other groups as well – with numerous expected and unexpected consequences. And, while addressing terrorism is repeatedly professed as the collaborative goal for both, there remain conflicts of interest, financial issues and scepticism of commitment on both sides – or what has entered diplomatic jargon as the ‘trust deficit’.

Given that a fundamentalism of religious nature is being targeted, it was inevitable that a collective Muslim psyche would become disillusioned - especially since much of the Islamic world has faced its ramifications in some form. As the argument takes the unfortunate turn towards an axiomatic ‘us vs. them’ debate, Pakistan finds itself in the unique, if also unwanted, position of a Muslim country siding with the U.S. against Muslim extremists. The irony of a country founded in the name of religion now fighting against ‘religious’ insurgencies is not lost on many. Self-contradictions abound in Pakistan and the war on terror is no exception. It is for this reason that an alliance with the major perpetrators of the said war– primarily the United States – has not had popular support.

While details of military operations against insurgents in Pakistan are beyond the scope of this paper, it is sufficient to say that its role, both ideologically and militarily, has been gradually increasing. While the U.S. concentrates on the situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan has simultaneously been carrying out operations in regions reportedly being used by a vast terrorist network that includes Al Qaeda and now primarily the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). However, this does not mean that the U.S. is not involved in the country, either. In fact, the extent of its involvement becomes a bone of contention, creating widespread unease. From the much publicised ground operations and the legitimate rancour that followed, to cases of ‘missing persons’ and most persistently

the continued attacks by unmanned predator planes, feelings of condescension in an imbalanced relationship remain prevalent.

Drone attacks necessitate some scrutiny since they have come to symbolize much of what is wrong with the U.S.-Pakistan alliance. Apart from valid legal and ethical considerations, there is the very real anxiety due to numerous civilian deaths that are, regrettably, dismissed as 'collateral damage'. Indeed, reports show that militant deaths account for a fraction of total killings, and opinion remains divided regarding the very usefulness of the strategy. Severely destabilising, this has led to public unrest and retaliation – a phenomenon which appears to be moving into international spheres as well. Interestingly, concerns are also echoed in government circles, with the highest possible levels of State authority acknowledging the dangers of such measures and calling for technology transfer, which has only partly been responded to.

Worryingly, the trend of drone attacks is rising phenomenally, with 2010 witnessing over forty attacks inside the first six months, while there had been just over fifty such attacks in all of last year. Although the collateral damage is reportedly decreasing as intelligence gets more effective, even elements within the United Nations have publicly called for banning drone attacks, terming it a policy that replicates a 'playstation mentality'. It appears, however, to be a strategy that will continue to be in use for some time to come.

A new approach for the war in Afghanistan has caused further problems since it threatens to increase tensions for an already overstretched army due to a likely 'spill over' into Pakistani territory. Ironically, enhanced military operations are accompanied by criticism that not enough is being done. There remains the constant pressure to expand operation to areas that have reportedly become safe havens for militants. For all the concerns however, this strategy has also established once and for all that the U.S. sees its success in Afghanistan only if it succeeds in Pakistan.

Nonetheless, constant pressure to expand military operations to North Waziristan and other more controversial areas has added to public fury, and also frustrated the military and the State. Despite repeated public and private confidence-building measures and overtures to show long-term U.S. support, the alliance remains filled with mistrust and commitment pressures. The consequences lead to high anti-American sentiment, and to militant groups' engaging in terrorism in order to fight against the State alliance with their sworn enemy.

Public sentiment

The current phase of heightened cooperation between Pakistan and the U.S. starts with the war on terror. Since many current crises tormenting the country are directly related to this watershed in global and national policy, for once conventional wisdom in partly attributing instability in the country to the war, and correspondingly to the alliance with the U.S., does have some credibility. Studying Pakistan-U.S. ties makes it almost mandatory to point out an otherwise evident factor – it involves not just a relationship between two States, but also involves another major actor: the Pakistani public.

When public perceptions are studied, they are seen to likely ignore blurry lines between myths and realities. They are also likely to portray strong nationalistic and perhaps misplaced tendencies to blame the axiomatic 'other'. More importantly, public opinions are likely to cater to possible conspiracy theories abundant in this part of the world. Yet, they remain important even if they represent popular rhetoric based on unfounded evidence since they show a collective national sentiment and an unrest that needs to be tackled, specifically if it leads to extremism and hence instability. In the case of Pakistan, this becomes all the more important due to a presence of non-State actors if not in the policy-making arena – which in itself is debatable – then definitely in the policy-influencing arena.

There is widespread belief that the West has an agenda of destabilizing the Muslim world, of which Pakistan is an important part due, among other factors, to its nuclear capability. As the perceptions rise, so does intolerance and extremism in retaliation. Whether or not the claims are justified, they need to be given adequate attention since perceptions – real or imagined – cause tensions between a frustrated, suspicious public and a State that is allied with the U.S. Recent events have exacerbated an anti-American sentiment even as conciliatory approaches from the U.S. try to reach out to the civil society. The discourse on social exclusion in this context might do well to expand to a more global framework.

Matters have not been helped as reports of 'arrogant' American officials, presence of foreign security companies involved in secret missions in the country, and of cases such as Dr. Aafia Siddiqui keep trickling in and are taken up by media and human rights groups. Coupled with reported harassment of these diplomats, rejection of visas to

numerous Americans and conflicting reports regarding the presence of Blackwater/Xe services, conspiracy theories are bundled in with facts. Consequently, public sentiment seems driven towards venting frustrations and a general hatred of the West. It becomes a bigger issue when this leads to acts of terrorism which are then justified on religious or retaliatory grounds.

While Pakistan's extensive involvement in the war against terrorism had traditionally been criticised, the notion is changing. However, even as military operations against insurgents inside the country have gained acceptance of the masses, anti-Americanism prevails. And when one talks of instability in the country, this sentiment cannot be factored out. The contention is not so much that actions that fuel reaction need to stop; it is simply that public sentiment – whether through real or imagined experience – drives much of what happens in the country and discounting it only means that a vital link to establishing control over terrorist activities is ignored.

Aid issues

Pakistan is the one of the foremost recipients of aid from the U.S. and while the predominant opinion is that this is a necessary tool for stabilising the country, there is concern regarding inefficiency in planning and the modus operandi of distribution. Red tape, ad hoc policies and corruption have led to such mismanagement that billions of dollars have been delivered, but apart from the military, there seems to be no large-scale socioeconomic improvements as a result. There is also the other less understood concept behind development and the conditions attached, which in effect reduce the actual volume of aid.

The Kerry-Lugar legislation, an aid package for Pakistan from the U.S. promising USD 7.5 billion over a period of five years for non-military social sectors, is a key current issue in this context. Furious reactions from the Pakistani public, media personnel and even military leaders on how it affects sovereignty due to attached conditions had perhaps more to do with language of the bill than intention. However, what was ignored was the most important aspect of such aid in the development discourse – i.e., implementation. It still remains unclear how the process is going to work out, amid criticism that it has been excessively delayed and does not understand systems in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, there is an active debate inside the U.S. regarding distribution of the aid – looking at the larger development narrative, this refers to a comparison between the consequences of aid and its efficient use through the use of foreign, developed country contractors and NGOs, or through agents and the State in the recipient developing country. This has indeed divided politicians and policymakers, including the very makers of the bill.

There are other more damning critiques of the concept altogether, with the contention aid leads to dependence. There are, however, larger issues at play when one reassesses circumstances contextually. In the case of Pakistan-U.S. relations for instance, Pakistan has been heavily funded for fighting terrorism, with the Coalition Support Fund, meant to reimburse allies of the U.S. for assistance in the war on terror. This has become a major bone of contention, given that payment is delayed for services that are deemed to be in lieu of what is owed to the country. With this comes the ideological question of why the country needs to be reimbursed if it is fighting its own war, but more importantly brings up the more blatant question of mutual trust, which has also lacked in this relationship.

As already noted, even trust-building exercises are treated with scepticism. Indeed, Pakistan has received tremendous aid from the U.S. over the last decade, albeit for military concerns, and there have been calls for economic aid if only to rebuild war-torn areas. As foreign NGOs increase the scope of their work amid criticism that post-conflict regions are neglected, the response to the Kerry-Lugar legislation also that shows how deep anti-Americanism is. Ironically, the bill was expected to create better partnerships by aiming to develop ignored sectors in Pakistan. Huge public outcry was echoed by the army as protests evolved from a popular domain to institutional and political levels.

Aid remains a contentious issue, but one that provides the much needed space for mutual collaborative efforts that may spill on to other areas and strengthen a shaky relationship. This is because it can lead to civilian partnerships, improve public relations and be a significant factor in developing trust between States and between people. Numerous health, education and awareness programmes, even outside the scope of the Kerry-Lugar legislation, show a level of commitment – even if efficiency and usefulness is questionable – that manifests U.S. intentions towards the development of Pakistan. And that recognition needs to spread to the general public.

Miscommunication and mistrust

The U.S. has been called Pakistan's 'fickle ally', and even a cursory glance at the ups and downs of the relationship will confirm this claim. In the current phase where Pakistan has been declared a major non-NATO ally, there has been need felt to rethink the norms of its relationships.

Pakistan's status as a 'frontline State' has long been established. Opinion remained divided, at least initially, as to whether current counter-insurgency operations were part of 'our' war or 'theirs'. This 'other' has remained part of national psyche. On the other hand, the U.S. has also recognized the need for deeper understanding with Pakistan if the war on terror is to reach a successful end, and many confidence-building measures have been undertaken, including a high-level visit from Secretary of State Hilary Clinton that sought to appease the masses and gain their trust.

However, even as the war goes deeper into Pakistani territory at huge physical, social and economic costs to the country, there is constant pressure from the U.S. to expand operations into other parts that are perceived to be Taliban strongholds. Given the already ambivalent feelings to the law-enforcing operations and perennially high anti-Americanism, such pressure is treated with contempt and adds to tensions in the country. Indeed, there have been instances of the military leaders' strongly reacting against external pressure in rare public shows of defiance as they reiterate Pakistan's stance.

The reaction comes also in view of American determination to accord greater responsibility in the region to India and convincing Pakistan of its peaceful intentions. This is the pretext used to convince the military to expand its operations, moving soldiers from the Indian border to the western Taliban strongholds. For many Pakistanis, this is enough evidence of the lack of understanding that the American officials hold – or, of ulterior motives to destabilise Pakistan.

Conflicting interests and goals remain present while fighting what is reasoned to be a mutual enemy. Pakistan is accused of hiding essential intelligence and only providing 'second-rate militants' to appease the U.S. while also catering to its own interests of retaining the Taliban for use in future. The U.S. on the other hand is blamed for following strategies that will potentially leave Pakistan vulnerable once it starts pulling out from Afghanistan.

Arrests of key militants have, however, cautiously seen intelligence agencies of both countries build some bridges, even as the CIA remains wary of its collaboration with the ISI which it sees as an institution that intrudes in politics unjustifiably. Pressure remains high as the success of U.S. strategy depends on Pakistani commitment and there have even been suggestions of increased direct U.S. role in the country. However, given the aforementioned public sentiment, as well as concerns of the nation's sovereignty being compromised, such suggestions are likely to be met with much disapproval.

Nevertheless, the U.S. does recognize the need to create long-term and trustworthy ties with Pakistan. Calls for an enhanced partnership, based on combined military, political but especially economic ties and the use of U.S. finance and technology in areas where it is badly needed, for instance energy and education, are being advocated in policy circles. This is based on the principle of short-term humanitarian assistance but also high-impact projects for long-term sustainable growth. The implicit assumption is that this will lead to stability and decrease militancy among the populace.

Essentially, security is a recognized global issue, and for various reasons Pakistan is seen a necessary ally in the U.S.-led programmes to target terrorism around the world. The United States has recognized that it has been 'relatively miserly' in its assistance to Pakistan and that a stable Pakistan is in the best interests of the international community since consequences of a failed Pakistan will be 'catastrophic', not just for the region, but for the U.S. as well. Indeed while there has not been a strike as drastic as the 9/11 attack on U.S. soil since then, there are concerns that Islamic militancy has actually risen in the meanwhile.

For Pakistan, there is need for deeper understanding of contradictions in its policies and the need to build consensus; the U.S. is a major ally and – a much needed ally, given the economic situation – but to a certain extent, de-linking from a U.S.-led policy has to be considered in the short-term future. In order to mollify disgruntled masses, to 'regain' sovereignty and become self-sustaining, certain steps for redefining the relationship are necessary.

There is much appeal in the argument that Pakistan is heavily reliant on the U.S. and that its policies are decided in Washington. Regardless of whether factual evidence can support such strong claims, there is always reason to understand why and how public

opinions are created – and in this case able to strengthen over decades. Involvement in the war on terror, the ‘either you are with us or against us’ slogans, coupled with widespread perceptions of a Western-Israeli agenda against Islam, have all played their part in anti-Americanism and, by default, an anti-State stance.

The potential for building substantial partnerships in various sectors has been recognized, but such a mutually beneficial relationship has proven to be difficult to maintain. Pakistan has continually voiced its concerns of receiving mixed signals from the U.S. – a recent example being the unfortunate comments of ‘severe consequences’ if terror attacks are traced to Pakistan by Hilary Clinton, coming after weeks of friendly diplomacy. With ‘strategic talks’ held between the two nations in March 2010 and a second round later in the year however, Pakistan might finally be putting forward its concerns. As with all things related to U.S.-Pakistan relations, there exist a plethora of views exhibiting extreme polarisation; yet if nothing else, it is a step in the right direction.

Past mistakes remain but there are reasons for optimism. The relationship itself has always been a difficult one, but serious efforts are being made to arrive at a long-term, stable and mutually beneficial future, which goes beyond empty diplomatic jargon. But a rather optimistic vision can be held only if natural and inevitable hurdles along the way – for instance, Faisal Shahzad and his failed attempt at bombing New York’s Times Square – are treated just like that: as hurdles that must be overcome and dealt with, without losing sight of the ultimate end; a stable, mutually beneficial and long-term relationship.

Afghanistan and Pakistan

Many of Pakistan’s social problems find a direct link to the last Afghan war; currently these go much beyond the social and into the structural and institutional realms. While difficult, it is necessary to separate Pakistan’s relationship with Afghanistan from that with the U.S. in the ongoing war. That said, when it comes to discussing it as a factor of instability, the two are inextricably linked. Consequently, this section will address some key destabilising elements arising from Afghanistan, specifically in the context of the simultaneously ongoing wars in both countries.

Essentially, current strategies of the war in Afghanistan and their consequences for Pakistan; and the linkages between terrorist groups will form the bulk of this section. This obviously ignores other perhaps wider social imbalances including drugs and arms smuggling and refugee issues which are better treated now as Pakistan's internal problems. This also means that other more serious concerns such as Kashmir that are also heavily linked to the jihadi movement that reached full throttle due to the Afghan imbroglio, will not be part of this contemporary argument limited to the war on terrorism regardless of their importance

The Af-Pak war

While many claim that the term 'Af-Pak' in itself is a misnomer since it implies that both countries are involved in a singular war, it goes to show how closely linked they are. More importantly, it shows how both are perceived to be the same. For a war that has regional and global dimensions, this has naturally created some unnatural alliances. Yet, the complexities within these are manifest; as Afghan President Karzai noted in a scathing attack on the West, particularly the US, "...there is a thin curtain between invasion and cooperation-assistance." Statements such as these show that all is not well on the Afghan front. However, while the Afghan and U.S. officials continue to mend fences, what does instability in Pakistan owe to the dynamics in Afghanistan?

The new American strategy has covered three broad aspects; a troop surge, an eventual withdrawal and reconciliation with the Taliban within what is a decidedly population-centred approach. There are those, however, who continue to deride the surge policy as reminiscent of the Bush era. Others also see the threat of terrorism for the U.S. to be overstated and exaggerated and so unable to justify expensive wars. This is further intensified by the criticism on 'overspending' on counterterrorism, when theoretically it is an acceptable risk even when exaggerations are taken into account.

These accounts have much bearing on the situation in Pakistan. Essentially, if the war is being fought on the basis of a threat of international dominance of the Al Qaeda and Taliban, this also alludes to Pakistan's providing 'safe havens' to militants. That this is already perceived to be the case has been established by the Obama administration and hence any new movements in Afghanistan are not just likely to cause ramifications for Pakistan; it is inevitable that they will do so.

On the one hand there is blatant evidence of unrest in Pakistan which can in many ways be traced back to the war in Afghanistan and its coinciding factors; this is manifest in the spate of suicide bombings of 2009 for instance. However, there are also the more subtle, less tangible destabilizing effects of the war. While outside the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that the Afghan-Soviet war and the support of the Taliban – who have been called the Frankenstein's monsters of Pakistan - has led now to a breakaway, armed and powerful non-State actor threatening to overrun the State. And with Afghanistan being a Taliban-run State before the attacks on New York, Pakistan's alliance –whether forced or voluntary – was essential not just for short-term goals, for instance capturing Osama bin Ladin, but also long-term vision for the region.

These were the circumstances in which the current war against terror began and Pakistan's presence has since been ubiquitous. The consequences – perhaps clearer today than a decade ago – of corresponding violence and reactionary terrorism see Pakistan involved in military operations against a local Taliban insurgency and looking increasingly fragile in different parts of the country where militant groups have created strongholds, even as successful operations in important regions have given breathing space.

Unpredictability is a constant theme in any war, but the inherent complexity in the Afghan war has brought this to new levels. While avoiding talk of an exit strategy in early 2009 was hailed as 'a wise decision', just months down the line it is considered prudent to make it a central point in a new military-led approach. Moreover, while previously, efforts at reconciliation with adversaries were deemed 'half-hearted at best and ignorant of the rich history of Afghan deal-making,' reconciliation has taken centre stage.

On a political level, this puts Pakistan in a dilemma of handling its ties between the U.S. and Afghanistan, in addition to controversial groups in its own territory - as evidenced in the arrest of Mullah Baradar, a high-ranking Taliban leader, in Karachi. On the one hand, this has been hailed as a victory for Pakistani ties with the U.S., showcasing heightened intelligence-sharing, but it has also caused some ire in the Afghani circles since the arrested Baradar was reportedly in negotiations with the Afghan State. Clearly, the alliance and priorities of all parties concerned require enhanced cooperation before a successful end can be reached.

On a more social level, however, how does this troop surge and exit strategy trouble Pakistan? On the one hand, there is the much justified fear of a rise in militancy in the country as regular bombings in the urban centres of Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Lahore and Peshawar, especially in 2009, showed. On the other hand, there is also the 'do more' mantra that has added to the aforementioned anti-Americanism and consequently public unrest against the State. Moreover, by expanding operations there are also the valid concerns of displaced people which require comprehensive planning.

Evaluating the consequences of the Afghan strategy for Pakistan's stability requires analyses primarily of the aforementioned troop surge, and the additional aspect of reconciliation with militants. A surge is expected to increase militancy in Pakistan, and the withdrawal of some U.S. bases along the border increases this possibility. There are chances that this move allows more ground for the Afghan Taliban to cooperate with like-minded Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and Tahreek-i-Nifaaz Shariat-e-Mohammadi, among other groups, on the border, consequently placing great strain not just on the army but on civilians as well. We need to understand military operations within the wider context of the Afghan war. For Pakistan this means more complexities, including those of dealing with displaced people, and further problems of the likelihood of militants moving to areas such as south Punjab and North Waziristan.

Pakistan is likely to be a major player among the many stakeholders in the endgame to the Afghan war. And this would mean a major rethinking in foreign policy in Pakistan – again, another facet of instability since the Afghan question guides so much of what happens to the people. Pakistan's position has evolved. Rather than seeing the ethnic-Pushtun Taliban as its best hope of a friendly government in Kabul, its policymakers would now prefer the Taliban to be part of a broader-based Afghan government. A realization that extremists wielding unbridled power from Kabul tend to export disaster has set in and compelled Pakistan to negotiate with non-Taliban elements in Afghanistan.

While most analysts claim with almost complete certainty that as troops start accumulating in Afghanistan, militants will cross over into Pakistani territory, some argue that this is an exaggeration. This latter argument predicts, in fact, that in the end it may well see extremist elements move from Pakistan and into Afghanistan in order to retaliate against an enhanced Western force. Both arguments can claim that history is on their side – but these are unprecedented times. While there is a history of established forces of the Taliban moving to and from the border area to join jihad, and there is no reason for denying a repeat of this phenomenon, the conditions in Pakistan make any foretelling a conjecture at best.

A second prominent facet of the solution to the war is reconciliation with Taliban factions, mainstreaming the less dangerous ones into the political process. Yet, even as a move towards reconciliation occurs, it is likely to be beset with numerous problems of defining who to target – even if anti-Taliban local forces are well defined, chances are that these lashkars are not prepared, either physically or materially, to counter the problems being faced. Indeed, there are concerns that such a decision could lead to a spiralling civil war.

With the close links shared by militants in Pakistan, an escalation of troubles may well seep into the country – indeed, the border regions will be directly affected. Moreover, given that leaders of the Afghan Taliban, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who are touted to be operating from Pakistani territory, Pakistan's role in the reconciliation process – and subsequent instability – should not come as a surprise. The aforementioned arrest of Mullah Baradar, among others, from Karachi is further indication of how these efforts directly involve the country even when it is the Afghan Taliban in question and not home-grown insurgents.

Pakistan has been criticised for aiding the Taliban while putting up a façade; relations with Afghanistan have been strained even as these allegations are continually denied officially. Nonetheless, the opinion persists. The bitterness works both ways, however, since the countries share a “long history of each State offering sanctuary to the other's opponents has built bitterness and mistrust between the two neighbours.”

Essentially then, the dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan ties have traditionally been worrisome to start with. With the ongoing war against terrorism, these have been exacerbated. No matter how one takes instability – be it political, social, economic or related to terrorism - conditions in Pakistan seem to change according to the conditions in Afghanistan. And when it comes to ideologically-driven extremism in the two countries and the groups that come up, it becomes imperative to study their connections, if any.

Militant groups

For any policy aiming to overcome extremism, targeting established militant groups, and the roots of militancy within them, is a necessary starting point. Questions arise as to whether militant groups in Pakistan, the most well-known among them being the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), are part of the Taliban movement at large or whether they carry different ideals.

With a multiplicity of such militant organizations, or non-State actors in colloquial terms, some acting as subsidiaries of legitimate bodies, it remains unclear whether their interests converge on all aspects. Care must be taken to understand further complexities in jihadi groups, all of which may not be moved to action with the same motives. Agendas may be different, but the *modus operandi*, i.e., using terrorism to achieve goals, may be the same. And, in the context of this study, it becomes crucially important to examine militant groups' relationships in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Shared usage of the term 'taliban' should give an indication that on some level, a connection is easily made. The success of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan finds its roots in support from Pakistan which was also one of only three countries to officially recognize them as legitimate rulers of the country. This predates 9/11, but establishes one key point, i.e., even before deconstructing the issue of terrorism in Pakistan, we recognize strong linkages to the Taliban. And with many of Pakistan's recent problems involving the TTP and other militant groups, policy implications necessitate establishing ideological but also other patterns of cooperation between these and apparently similar groups in Afghanistan.

Broadly, it serves our purpose to establish the links – if any – between the Afghan and the Pakistan Taliban. Moving on from there is a more interesting and taxing process of tackling the phenomenon of the 'good' and 'bad' Taliban that has caused much debate and ultimately resulted in a potentially large-scale strategy of integration in Afghanistan, while doubts continue to persist in Pakistan. Increasingly, the discourse also includes non-Taliban militant elements, including the Punjab-based groups that include the controversial Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

One of the less understood factors behind a seemingly shared ideology can be traced to the mushrooming of militant madrasas in Pakistan in the 1980s – a phenomenon that on its own derailed the evolutionary process of madrasas as educational institutions. These religious seminaries developed mindsets, but also armed militias that served the purpose of jihad against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The success of this policy – or

rather its failure in retrospect – is manifest in the fact that contemporary militant leaders are products of these very madrasas.

State sponsorship of terrorism, an allegation that continues and is perhaps enhanced today, is an important aspect of the current discourse. Mujahedin of the State-manufactured militias who aided the jihad in Afghanistan and paved the way for Taliban rule, have since become involved in guerrilla fighting elsewhere. The TTP phenomenon today, as well as the resurgence of Punjab-based groups then, owes much to the loosely defined militias that have had alleged State support both institutionally and materially.

This adds to Pakistan's dilemmas since claims of support for jihadi groups to counter India are widespread and believed to be causing hesitancy among the establishment when it comes to eliminating the Taliban. The argument has two sides to it – one, the links and perhaps agreements that have been made with armed groups, which if broken can lead to chaos given their organizational skills; and second, the idea that there is a deliberate attempt to retain the Taliban for use as proxy fighters in future.

It is no surprise that post-Mumbai attacks in 2008, groups such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba have come to the forefront again. Increasingly, the links between such Punjabi groups with the Taliban are being brought up – the implication being that they are increasing their presence in the current Afghan war. The single most definitive destabilising factor for Pakistan consequently becomes terrorism – both home-grown and imported – and the country finds itself involved in military operations aimed at eliminating armed terrorist outfits amid sporadic criticism from both Afghanistan and the U.S.

The fact that Baradar and others are captured in Pakistan, while showing enhanced Pak-U.S. intelligence sharing, also shows that the Afghan Taliban have relied on Pakistan as a 'rear base'. Clearly then, militant ties that go across borders are an established institution – a loose transnational network that involved both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Perhaps the material links and potential for cooperation are inevitable due to the porosity of a contentious border. A notoriously difficult terrain adds to, for instance, the

symbolic mystique of Osama bin Laden being able to hide in mountains. More importantly, claims of such safe havens for the militant groups from both Pakistan and Afghanistan, create concerns for the former in military and diplomatic domains. This also leads to pressure in order to deal with these areas where terrorists can regroup – North Waziristan is constantly mentioned in such a scenario even as the military keeps a focus on other areas in need of more immediate attention. Southern Punjab has also emerged as another area where terrorism is allegedly being fomented.

Operations against these militant groups, notably the TTP, occur in different phases and have led to retaliatory incidents of terrorism all over the country. This ‘war within’ is likely to prolong misery for millions and become worse before it gets better since the forces are not trained for counterinsurgency. With campaigns covering Swat and South Waziristan and requiring State support for civilian rehabilitation for post-conflict sustainability of peace, any institutional weakness can be disastrous. There have been reports of a return of terrorists to regions that had been cleared, since comprehensive attention could not be paid to all aspects of conflict resolution. In these circumstances, calls for targeting more areas persist and one can clearly see the drawbacks of the Afghan war for Pakistani society at large.

Forecast for a likely future scenario has been unusually pessimistic. This is not surprising, given the ideological, social and economic facets of terrorism coupled with external factors that together make for a complex picture. However, the forecast as visualized by some external observers, including ranks given on failed state indices, appear to be exaggerated at best. For Pakistan, this is exasperating since it has committed itself to counter insurgencies and sacrificed materially, physically and socially.

Yet opinion-makers continue to be sceptical. Consider for instance the bleak prospects put forward: “Pakistan, which is critical to the outcome of operations in Afghanistan, is to whittle the Afghan Taliban. In reaction, its ally the Pakistani Taliban is likely to take flight into the Indus plain and Karachi. Pakistan, the second best-positioned State to tackle terrorism, could be destabilized, with an obvious impact on the conflict outcome. A situation of civil war would have massive human security consequences”.

While such an assessment can be deemed an implausible worst-case scenario, the internal and external dynamics of terrorism need to be underlined. For Pakistan, this means a deeper understanding of the situation in Afghanistan and how groups in

Pakistan feed off it, causing unrest and violence since security issues as a result of militancy are the primary factor of instability.

For policymakers, the situation reaches perplexing new levels as the TTP is deemed to sustain itself through alliances “with any number of other militant groups, splinter cells, foot soldiers and guns-for-hire in the areas under their control.” This not only makes it difficult to distinguish between targets but also adds to combined skills and tactics of a new, morphed alliance of terrorists that also includes Al Qaeda and multiple Punjab-based groups that had earlier sought to focus on other motives altogether.

As the lines between the two different Taliban movements and other terrorist groups slowly start to blur, there remains to be seen whether the mantra of reintegration and reconciliation that is in vogue in Afghanistan will also ultimately be tried in Pakistan. Indeed, indications are that this might well be the case as the environment becomes conducive to such a policy.

There are increasing reports of rifts between various factions within the Taliban and among various militant groups, all of which feed off each other, and these are likely to dominate in the coming months as integration is discussed. Moreover, the dilemma of North Waziristan, which is of immense importance as far as commonalities in the terror network in Pakistan and Afghanistan is concerned, needs to be addressed. While a delay has been understandable at least locally, all signs point to a future showdown in the region as the military attempts to take on what will be perhaps its ‘biggest challenge’.

This does not mean that the State, and the military, have been absolved of all blame in terms of allegedly supporting terrorist networks. The TTP is considered to be ‘essentially a copycat movement’ of the Afghan Taliban aided by other home-grown terrorists such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba; and given the ambiguity of these groups, even as the military takes on large-scale operations, the allegation is that ‘mainstream jihadist groups...continue to be tolerated.’ For State policy of nullifying the effects of extremism, this perception needs to be changed.

Another view, recognizing established ties between terrorists on both sides of the border, blames the Pakistani military of targeting militants selectively, rather than

fighting the ideology itself. However, the selectiveness that had allowed terrorists focusing on Afghanistan to continue unhindered is becoming increasingly difficult since factions within competing groups have developed as the area becomes “an alphabet soup of dangerous militant groups ... helping each other out and selling their services to the highest bidder.”

Essentially then, while indeed ‘Af-Pak’ may be a misnomer, there is no doubt that the wars do share elements in both countries. As with the U.S., there is a belated attempt with Afghanistan to reach mutually beneficial ends. And for all the pessimism surrounding the terrorism network and the inability to decipher its complexities, perhaps a state-level diplomatic process will catalyse a peaceful end to the wars in Afghanistan and in Pakistan.

Conclusion

Pakistan carries with it much excess baggage, both historical and current, and both internal and external. It is imperative, in order to shed some of this unwanted weight, that issues are dealt with dispassionately. It is a little too convenient, as this essay might deceive to suggest, that all or even most internal problems in the country owe their mushrooming to what were essentially external causes. However, it is equally unjust to ignore foreign influences altogether.

This recognition is important not for the fringe benefits of victimization, but for contextualized and collectively planned solutions to be sought. Indeed, most predicaments today will be traced to multiple sources; such is the interconnectedness of the world. The war in Afghanistan – and the fact that it is part of what has been called the ‘global’ war on terror should give a clear hint to prove this interconnectedness – is no different. That Pakistan faces strain from its relations with Afghanistan and the United States in this context is an inevitability that needs to be dealt with accordingly. And, perhaps being progressive, a more post-modern approach to conflict resolution is called for; an approach that is perhaps implicit within the gradually institutionalizing norms of globalization – norms that most of the world is still coming to terms with.

The age of globalization – the Hobsbawmian age of extremes - has meant that while many opportunities arise and benefits are acquired, there are also more confusions and

a spillover of the worst effects. This may include, for instance, diseases, the woes of immigration, forms of neo-slavery, cultural degradation, climate change and environmental damage; in the context of this essay, it may also mean extremism, terrorism and political polarization between the manufactured first and third worlds. This in itself is the majesty, and the tragedy, of globalization.

The challenge for Pakistan is to overcome long-standing differences and create more stable and beneficial relationships with the United States and Afghanistan. In war, generations are lost, lands destroyed and rebuilding can take decades. That fate may still not be avoided. But for many, a better and more consistent handling of relations with these countries may not mean lives changed for the better, it may mean lives saved. And that perhaps, is the best outcome from war that one can hope for.

Notes & References

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[1] Pakistan currently ranks 10th in a Failed State Index defined by Fund for Peace, a research institute working on conflict situations. Pakistan has been ranked consistently high in its annual ranking based on various variables. Details and the list of countries can be found at: <http://www.fundforpeace.org>. This is not an official ranking; reports and research centres that have used the term 'failed state', for Pakistan or otherwise all use their own criteria.

[2] Michael Hirsh and Ron Moreau, "The Most Dangerous Nation in the World Isn't Iraq – It's Pakistan", Newsweek, Oct 29 2007.

[3] A detailed account of terrorism, crimes, etc., in Pakistan in 2009 can be found in "Pakistan Security Report 2009" by Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) where a comparison is also made to previous years to show the substantial growth in speed and spread of terrorism in Pakistan.

[4] "Chronology of Pak-US Relations", Dawn Magazine, August 24, 2008. A short article, this highlights important events. For a more comprehensive view covering the highs and lows of the relationship, especially since the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s, see, Hilary Synnot, "What is happening in Pakistan?", Survival, vol.51, no.1, Feb-Mar 2009, pp 61-80.

[5] America's hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan has been accepted as a mistake by, among others, the then Senator Hillary Clinton. In her speech to the Council on Foreign Relations on December 15, 2003, she noted that, "We cannot afford to make the same mistake that we made in 1989..." Full text can be found at: http://www.cfr.org/publication/6600/remarks_by_senator_hillary_rodham_clinton_transcript.html?id=6600

[6] Synnot, op. cit. The article contains a succinct yet well examined background of current insurgencies.

[7] Candace Rondeaux and Karen DeYoung, "U.S. Troops Crossed Border, Pakistan Says", Washington Post, September 4, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/03/AR2008090300523.html>

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[9] Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann's database at the New America Foundation reports total deaths as result of drone attacks in Pakistan in the period from 2004-2009 to be ranging from 734 to 1051, with figures being estimates at best owing to the lack of monitoring. Of these, between 446 and 709 are estimated to be militants. Worryingly, the frequency of attacks is rising over time, with the majority of these figures in 2008 and 2009. Till June 11 in 2010, between 224 and 371 people have reportedly been killed, of which between 198 and 323 are alleged militants. The regularly updated database is available at <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones/2009>

[10] Mark Mazzetti and Scott Shane, "Evidence Mounts for Taliban Role in Car Bomb Plot", New York Times, May 5, 2010. The failed Times Square bombing attempt by Pakistani-born Faisal Shahzad has been seen as retaliation to persistent drone attacks, as noted by Minister Rahman Malik. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/06/nyregion/06bomb.html?ref=global-home>

[11] Asif Ali Zardari, "For Pakistan, no turning back from reform", Washington Post, January 15, 2010. The President of Pakistan highlights the concerns of the public regarding an alliance with the U.S., noting that the concern should be understood.

[12] Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, New American Foundation report, op. cit.

[13] "U.N. Investigator Calls For Halt to CIA Drone Killings", New York Times, June 2, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2010/06/02/world/international-uk-killings-drones.html?ref=global-home>

[14] President Obama's West Point speech, where he outlined the new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan, noted the key points as a troop surge, a civilian approach and a drawing down by mid-2011. Full text can be found at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>

[15] Karin Brulliard, "Pakistan worried U.S. build-up in Afghanistan will send militants across border", Washington Post, January 5, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/04/AR2010010403335.html>

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[17] Jane Perlez, "U.S. push to expand in Pakistan meets resistance", New York Times, October 6, 2009. The author notes that American expansion in Pakistan in terms of personnel, embassy and aid package are all being interpreted in more sinister ways by the masses, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/06/world/asia/06islamabad.html>

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[20] Jane Perlez, "Pakistanis continue to reject U.S. partnership", New York Times, October 1, 2009. The article reports on a survey carried out by the International Republican Institute which shows deep anti-Americanism among Pakistanis, who reject militancy but also reject America as a partner. Eighty per cent of those polled, responded that said they were opposed to American involvement in Pakistan, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/01/world/asia/01pstan.html>

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