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Issue Brief

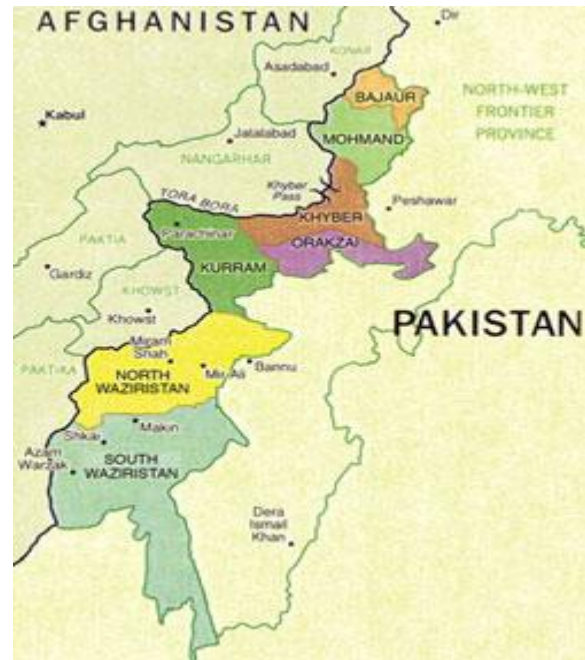
FATA: A Situational Analysis

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With the exception of the Mohmand agency, the overall security situation in FATA in 2016 witnessed a drastic improvement according to a report recently published by FATA Analysis and Strategy Team, (FAST) titled, *FATA 2016-FAST Annual Situation Analysis*. While the state of affairs in Mohmand agency remain volatile as the area is moving towards becoming a 'militancy density zone', the year 2016 saw an overall reduction in militancy in FATA, as militant related acts dropped from 691 in 2015 to 479 in 2016.



As a result of the success of military operations, the repatriation of Temporarily Displaced Persons (TDPs) had a success rate of 80%. The success in curbing terrorist activities has primarily been due to the military operations conducted by the Pakistani Army against terrorist outfits; namely the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JUA), and associated groups. In particular, the launch of operation *Zarb-e- Azb* in 2014 and ongoing operation *Radd-ul -Fasad* has played an instrumental role in pushing the TTP into Afghanistan and seeking sanctuary there.¹ However, despite the military successes, the threat of terrorism is still at large as is being witnessed in the Mohmand agency. Therefore, stringent security measures need to be adopted in order to completely curb the threat.

However, military success has come at a cost. Since 2006, more than 6864 people, including paramilitary forces have been killed in terror related violence.² Since the US intervention in Afghanistan, the state of affairs in FATA have consistently deteriorated, with a marked increase in violence, casualties and wide scale displacement. FATA has suffered greatly due to events in neighbouring Afghanistan, and while success has been achieved in eliminating the TTP safe havens in FATA, the fact that the TTP has set up bases across the border in Afghanistan is a cause of concern as is the alleged refuge given by Afghanistan to the TTP, and the JUA, as well as affiliated insurgent groups. The provinces of Kunar, Nuristan,³ Paktika, Gardaiz, Nangarhar and Pakitka have become the TTP's launching pads for cross border attacks into Pakistan.⁴ In 2016, more than 50 cross border attacks took

place, with 29 of them in the Bajaur agency which borders Afghanistan's Kunar province.⁵ Apart from targeting Pakistani check posts, the TTP have launched major attacks in Pakistan, including the attack on the Pakistani air force base, Badaber in Peshawar in September 2015, attack on the Army Public School in December 2015 which left 140 children dead,⁶ as well as a string of suicide bombings at Lal Shehbaz Qalandar shrine in Lahore, and Sewan Sharif in Sindh which killed scores of people.

As a result, Pakistan also announced several new border mechanisms to effectively secure its side of the border, prevent illegal crossing of militants and also to put an end to the continuous accusations levelled against Pakistan by Kabul for abetting the Taliban attacks in Afghanistan. These include the construction of several new posts, gates, aerial surveillance, as well as valid and legal travel documents (passport and visa) for all crossing the Pak-Afghan border. These new border initiatives have played a significant role in securing Pakistan's side of the border.

Apart from instability in Afghanistan, outdated administrative arrangements, weak and ineffective governance, rampant corruption, poor planning coupled with skewed development priorities continue to be the reasons behind FATA's current state of instability.

With the exception of a few minor amendments, Islamabad has continued to exercise the outdated British model of administration and retain the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) enacted in 1901. Despite nearly 70 years of independence, FATA has continued to operate under the same social, economic, political and legal system of administration and its people have been subjected to outdated laws that deny them the same democratic political system, fundamental human rights, and economic opportunities prevailing in the rest of Pakistan. Today, FATA's state of affairs are defined by rampant poverty (almost 60 per cent of the population living below the poverty line)⁷ and dismally low literacy rates (17 per cent of the overall population in FATA is literate).⁸ According to the report, reforms in FATA (political, administrative, social and economic), continue to be undermined by corruption and Islamabad's reluctance to deal with the issue. Militant groups like the TTP were able to easily seek refuge in FATA which was an area with little or no State authority. They thrived on the weak points of FATA i.e. poverty, illiteracy, State neglect and institutional isolation, win or gain popular support, and eventually established parallel government institutions.

FATA is possibly going through its most critical phase in its history – and the ultimate test and solution for FATA is political, social and economic development. However, this cannot be achieved unless and until its vague semi-autonomous status in the constitution is determined. The government must reform

and revitalize the system of administration currently in practice in FATA and replace it with the existing structure of governance prevailing throughout the rest of Pakistan. Hence, the essential pre-requisite for any change in FATA begins by changing the status of FATA from a 'special area' to an integral part of a province – in FATA's case, the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Hence, in this regard it is essential that pledges made by the current government for bringing reforms and development to FATA through FATA's reform package announced in March 2017, which was highly welcomed and a much needed step in the right direction. While immense hope and optimism had been generated, the government's decision to delay the implementation of the highly anticipated reforms has once again erased hopes for the people and future of FATA. Despite numerous promises of reform and development, the area has remained neglected by those in power and its greatest tragedy has always been its blatant neglect.

Even when there have been opportune moments to change the status of FATA, (as was the case with the recent reform package) political differences and clashing interests seem to have taken precedence. By failing to integrate FATA into the mainstream, the successive governments are partly, if not completely responsible for the current unrest and lawless nature of the area that has made it a perfect breeding ground for extremist elements. Half-hearted policies in the past have not worked, and in fact, have only made things worse and ignited resentment and doubt in the minds of the masses.

FATA cannot be isolated any more, nor can its people be neglected as they have been in the past. Bringing reform and development to FATA lie within the ambit and purview of the government and decision makers of the country. Hence, in order to maintain stability in FATA and consolidate the gains made in FATA and against terrorism, reforms in FATA should be seen through and implemented at the earliest in letter and spirit.

Notes and References

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