



## UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF MILITANCY AND MILITARY OPERATIONS ON THE SOCIO-POLITICAL MILIEU OF ERSTWHILE FATA

*Tahir Marwat*  
*School of Integrated Social Sciences*  
*University of Lahore*  
*Lahore - Pakistan*  
[tahirmarwat1212@gmail.com](mailto:tahirmarwat1212@gmail.com)

*Noor Rehman*  
*Lecturer*  
*School of Integrated Social Sciences*  
*University of Lahore*  
*Lahore - Pakistan*  
[rehmannoor053@gmail.com](mailto:rehmannoor053@gmail.com)

*Prof. Dr. Rabia Akhtar*  
*Head of the Department*  
*School of Integrated Social Sciences*  
*University of Lahore*  
*Lahore - Pakistan*  
[rabia.akhtar@csspr.uol.edu.pk](mailto:rabia.akhtar@csspr.uol.edu.pk)

### **Abstract**

*The former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan maintained a unique cultural and traditional identity, playing a crucial role in nurturing peace and stability within the region. However, the region's tranquility was disrupted by two significant events in neighboring Afghanistan. First, the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 led to the rise of religious fundamentalism. Second, the United States' invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 saw the disintegration of social and political structures relevant to the tribal society which was exacerbated by the region's geographical proximity and ethnic similarity to neighboring Afghanistan. The emergence of militant groups in FATA following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan received a substantial response from the Pakistan Army and led to military operations in both the Frontier Regions (FRs) and FATA. These militant groups were able to spread their networks across the region, recruiting significant numbers of local people to their ranks and causing widespread devastation to military installations, mosques, and schools, amongst other key locations. This paper examines the impacts of these political and military events on the socio-cultural dynamics of FATA, and the resulting effect on its traditional tribal structure. The paper utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach, incorporating analysis of official government and media reports, experts' interviews, and independent research on the ground. This research comprehensively explores the impact of religious extremism, ethnic conflicts, and military operations on the socio-political dynamics of the traditional tribal society of FATA. Ultimately, this research*



*provides a deeper understanding of the drivers behind the insurgency and conflict that have characterized this region and support efforts toward peace-building and conflict resolution.*

**Key Words:** Military operations, Tribal, War on Terror, FATA, Militancy, Culture, *Jirga*

### **Introduction**

The year 1979 marked a significant chapter in the history of this region, as it continues to grapple with the lasting impact of two major events that unfolded during that time. In February of that year, the Iranian Revolution sent shockwaves across the world, fundamentally altering Washington's approach to the Middle East. Meanwhile, as the United States was still processing the emergence of a theocratic regime in Iran, the Soviet Union made a decisive move by invading Afghanistan, a country already influenced by Communist ideology. The Soviet Union's incursion, which took place on Christmas Day, fueled concerns about its potential access to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, a development that had far-reaching implications. This apprehension ultimately ignited the final clash of the Cold War, delivering a significant blow to the fledgling Soviet Union.

Being geographically connected to Afghanistan and sharing ethnic, cultural, and religious ties with its people, Pakistan became an active participant in this protracted conflict. Its alliance with the United States positioned it as a crucial conduit for the supply of weapons and training to the Afghan Mujahedeen. Due to its proximity to the Afghan border and the presence of Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) provided a sanctuary of sorts for Afghan refugees and Mujahedeen. The desire to support their Pashtun brethren was deeply ingrained and widespread. As a result, tribesmen in FATA played an instrumental role in aiding the Mujahedeen in their fight against what they perceived as infidel forces.

Foreign volunteers hailing from across the Muslim world ably supported them. Noteworthy individuals like Abdullah Azam, Aiman Al-Zawahiri, and Osama Bin Laden emerged as prominent figures in the Afghan Jihad, their 'Holy war'. FATA served as a significant stronghold for the Jihadi groups combating Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. Consequently, adhering to the Geneva Accords of 1988, the Red Army of the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan. Dr. Najib, a Soviet protégé, found himself in a weakened position, confronting a resurgent Mujahedeen who took great pride in toppling a superpower. With fierce Mujahedeen offensives intensifying, Dr. Najib tendered his resignation in 1992, leading to the fall of Kabul. However, Dr. Najib's ousting did not bring about peace; instead, Afghanistan descended into a bloody civil war as various Afghan factions vied for control over Kabul. This internal strife among religious and ethnic groups plunged Afghanistan into further chaos. The resultant mayhem birthed the rise of the Taliban, a consequence of intense infighting and internecine conflict.



Led by former Mujahidin Mullah Muhammad Omar, this group brought an end to the civil war and governed the country from 1996 to 2001. While the Taliban restored order, their oppressive tactics and rigid beliefs garnered international criticism. The rise of the Taliban government attracted both local Afghans and FATA tribesmen to Kabul. As the years passed, the bond between the Taliban and the tribesmen grew stronger, fueled by the shared border, language, and Pashtun culture they both embraced (Siddique, 2014).

During the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan, the nation also harbored several foreign militant groups, notable among them being the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), and the infamous al-Qaeda. These groups prominently featured in numerous terrorist activities, with al-Qaeda accused of orchestrating attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the IMU engaging in multiple assaults against the Uzbek government, and the ETIM carrying out militant operations within China (Taj, 2011).

Al-Qaeda, among various militant groups, pursued a global agenda, evident in its targeting of American installations. The world was shaken by the tragic incident of 9/11, which abruptly altered local, regional, and international security dynamics. The U.S. attributed the event to Osama Bin Laden and his organization, al-Qaeda. Despite Pakistan's best efforts, the Taliban's refusal to extradite Bin Laden led to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Within days, the Taliban government was overthrown and Afghanistan was left devastated. The collapse of the Taliban regime resulted in the dispersal of Taliban fighters and foreign militants who sought refuge across the border in FATA (Ahmed, 2006).

Due to swift shifts in the strategic landscape, Pakistan strategically aligned itself by establishing an alliance with the United States during the period of the Global War on Terror. Simultaneously, as a result of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the Tribal Areas became a sanctuary for various militant groups and the Afghan Taliban. Over time, these militants gained increasing power and influence. Additionally, the region saw the cooperation of Soviet-era jihadists residing in FATA, as they joined forces with the Afghan Taliban and foreign militants.

Pakistan, therefore, undertook extensive measures to eradicate militants and dismantled their hideouts, albeit at a significant cost. The country endured a decade-long onslaught of brutal terrorism, leaving no doubt about the magnitude of the challenge. However, Pakistan's response to this unprecedented threat was hampered by confusion, as it found itself in uncharted territory. It took considerable time, relentless effort, immense sacrifices, and a degree of American cooperation for Pakistan to ultimately triumph over adversity.

At first, the government and military refrained from launching large-scale military operations. Instead, they opted for localized military actions and subsequently pursued peace agreements, like the prominent Shakai Deal in 2004 with local militant leader Nek Muhammad Wazir. However, these peace deals proved ineffective in addressing Pakistan's



emerging major challenge. On the contrary, they provided ample opportunities for militants to reorganize, severely harming Pakistan's security. As Ahmed Rashid notes, “from 2002 to 2004, the Army had done little to stop the militants’ movement in erstwhile FATA from solidifying their strongholds in Waziristan. On the one hand, the tribal people offered safe havens to them due to cultural considerations and helped them to a greater extent, and, on the other, Pakistan did not frame a clear counterterrorism strategy to deal with growing militant groups (Chan, 2009). It was not surprising that all of this was comprehensible, especially considering Pakistan was going through a learning phase. Additionally, the permeable border between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the lack of cooperation from Afghanistan and the U.S. in implementing effective management mechanisms hindered Pakistan's efforts.

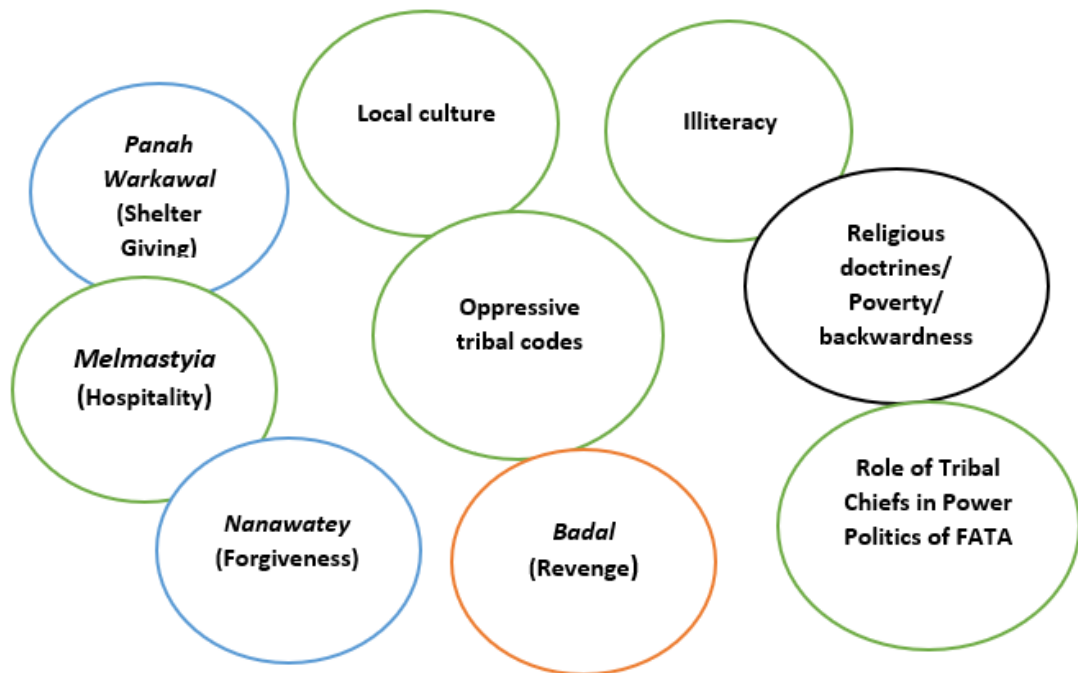
In response to localized military operations, militant groups launched strikes against both civilian and military targets. In 2004, the Nek Muhammad group attacked a Frontier Constabulary convoy in Kalosha and Dza Ghondai in South Waziristan. Subsequently, these militant factions expanded their networks and commenced targeting security forces in settled districts of Pakistan. The repercussions of their activities were keenly felt across the region, prompting the Pakistan Army to undertake significant military operations in the Tribal Areas. Several military operations, namely Operation Mizan (2002-2006), Operation Zalzal (2008), and Operation Rah e Rast (2007-2009), among others, were carried out to eradicate local and foreign militants from FATA and adjacent areas (Chan, 2009). The most well-known and effective military operation that eliminated inimical elements in North Waziristan was Operation Zarb-e-Azab (2014).

The success of this Operation can be credited to the Army's remarkable capacity to adapt and refine its tactics and operations. Notably, these strategic adjustments were implemented despite limited support from both the U.S. and Afghan governments, beset by suspicion and discontent. Such progress effectively showcases the substantial strides Pakistan has made in its unwavering battle against terrorism.

However, Pakistan's progress in countering terrorism came at a significant cost, particularly for the tribesmen of the former FATA. The disruptive forces of militancy and terrorism had a grave impact on the socio-political landscape in the tribal belt. Likewise, military operations proved to be a double-edged sword. Despite their successes, these operations resulted in tens of thousands of people from the erstwhile FATA being displaced and forced to reside in IDP camps. Additionally, they caused extensive damage to the infrastructure in the Tribal Areas. The actions of terrorists and military operations have tragically claimed the lives and livelihoods of thousands, and have witnessed the gradual erosion of the region's social fabric. The local masses in the Tribal Areas suffered enormously in the decade-long war between terrorist groups and the military (Chughtai, 2013). Despite the daunting challenges, it is noteworthy that the government and security forces actively endeavored to mobilize resources and provide assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs). Their



concerted efforts aimed to facilitate and support those in need, demonstrating a commendable commitment to addressing this pressing issue.



### **Militants in Erstwhile FATA and the Local Culture**

The cultural practices in FATA played a substantial role in fostering the rise of militancy and terrorism in the region. Because the aspect is the clash of cultures & civilizations, People worry about upholding and promoting their values, traditions, and customs in their native countries (Elahi, 2022). While understanding the cultural norms of Pashtunwali, the militants "exploited the tribal, ethnic, linguistic, and religious sentiments in their favor ('Āmir Rānā et al., 2010). Pashtunwali, a set of laws, governs the way of life for tribes. These customs shape their existence, dictating norms and upholding traditions with profound significance. The tribal community depends on it, and it is "practiced as a religion (ur Rehman, 2015). The behavior of the locals is deeply influenced by Pashtunwali, which shapes their actions from birth until death. Unfortunately, this generosity instilled in Pashtunwali and other tribal customs has been exploited by the Afghan Taliban and other terrorist groups. The failure of successive Pakistani governments to implement much-needed reforms in FATA has resulted in significant setbacks, including the lack of education and awareness. As a consequence, various militant groups have taken advantage of this void, operating freely in all the Agencies of FATA.



To fully grasp the significance of the planks of Pashtunwali and their role in aiding the expansion of militants in the Tribal Areas, it is vital to conduct a concise analysis. By examining these elements with precision, one can gain deeper insights into the subject.

### ***Badal (Revenge) a Tool for Promoting Violence***

In accordance with tribal customs, the pursuit of vengeance is considered a solemn obligation. Without exception, Pashtuns refuse to grant forgiveness to those who have wronged them. Consequently, numerous clans and tribes within the FATA region engaged in hostilities against one another. The “militant groups also incorporated Badal in order to recruit new members; they also exploited the civilian deaths in the anti-Taliban operations and U.S. drone strikes in FATA (Afsar et al., 2008). Such oppressive norms only promote violence and militancy and people become accustomed to using violence as a tool to exert their influence.

### ***Nanawatey (Forgiveness) is a Rarely Practiced Norm***

Nanawatey, with its inherent adaptability, can be understood through various perspectives. It involves the victims being earnestly implored for forgiveness. Following the War on Terror, militants sought solace in Nanawatey, urging those affected to join the insurgency in order to restore their lost honor or seek retribution for the loss of their loved ones (Afsar et al., 2008)

Both the locals and the militants knowingly and unknowingly established interdependent relationships by invoking these concepts. However, it is important to note that in the early years of Pakistan’s own war on terror, government and military officials made attempts to raise awareness among tribesmen about the importance of balancing their adherence to Pashtunwali while avoiding unintended support for current and prospective terrorists. Unfortunately, these efforts lacking a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, fell short of achieving the desired outcome.

### ***Melmastyia (Hospitality) as a Tool That Invites Terrorism***

Melma, a Pashto term denoting a guest, transcends racial, social, and economic divisions. Melmastyia unites all Pashtuns in their duty to extend protection, provision, and service to visitors. In adherence to cultural norms, it is incumbent upon Pashtuns to treat guests with utmost respect and ensure their safety. People used to give them respect and treated them well. Any form of harm towards guests is strictly forbidden. Notably, while “going through the Pashtun belt, the militants benefited from Pashtun hospitality, receiving moral, financial and logistic support for the insurgency (Afsar et al., 2008). Melmastyia holds a significant place within Pashtunwali, ingraining a cultural responsibility to extend hospitality, particularly toward visitors from afar. Such hospitality inadvertently allowed non-local militants, including Uzbeks, Arabs, Tajiks, and others, to establish firm connections, fortify their presence, and flourish in the region.





### **Panah Warkawal (Shelter Giving)**

Panah is an Arabic word that means *"take someone under personnel escort from the enemy"*. In accordance with Pashtunwali codes, even the most notorious criminal is provided protection when seeking Panah. The region emerged as a hub of militancy during Panah's reign, as it generously provided a safe haven to Arabs, Chechens, and Uzbeks without any conditions (Khan et al., 2019).

Both the locals and the militants knowingly and unknowingly established interdependent relationships by invoking these concepts. However, it is important to note that in the early years of Pakistan's own war on terror, government and military officials made attempts to raise awareness among tribesmen about the importance of balancing their adherence to Pashtunwali while avoiding unintended support for current and prospective terrorists. Unfortunately, these efforts, lacking a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, fell short of achieving the desired outcomes.

### **Islam and Militancy in FATA**

The principles of Pashtunwali and Islam resonate harmoniously with the Pashtun way of life. It is important to acknowledge that tribesmen hold a profound connection with their faith, diligently following the Sunni interpretation of Islam. Pashtuns staunchly abide by the principles of Islam, resulting in a conservative perspective. This aspect contributed to their admiration for the Taliban's governance in Afghanistan. As Safdar Sial writes, "Taliban's image of Islamic militia fighting against the 'infidels' and 'friends of invaders' has obviously had a strong appeal for the majority of the people in the tribal areas, if not for the region's population (Sial, 2010). The rapid dissemination of this narrative can be attributed, in large part, to the government's failure to develop a counter-narrative over a period of five years. Pakistan's response to terrorism and militancy suffered gravely from this particular deficiency.

The "War on Terror" had extensive ramifications, resulting in the emergence of militancy in FATA and significantly affecting both the socio-political landscape of the region and Pakistan's own harmony and steadiness. The cultural norms and political apparatus in FATA were not impervious to the deleterious impact of violence within and around the vicinity. The influence of militancy on FATA's socio-political framework was undeniable and served as a valuable learning experience.

### **The Role of Tribal Chiefs in the Power Politics of FATA**

The Maliks (tribal chiefs) wielded immense influence and continue to hold substantial sway in the social and political affairs of the region. Their decisions were unequivocally embraced as definitive by all members of the tribal society. Regrettably, the militants carried out targeted executions of government-sanctioned Maliks, peace committee members, and pro-government tribal elders in an attempt to undermine the established structures of authority and consolidate their own control (Group, 2009). More than 150 Maliks were killed by the Mujaheden Shura of North Waziristan, who also forbade the remaining Maliks and other



tribal elders from discharging their duties (Taj, 2011). Numerous tribal chiefs known as Maliks were tragically targeted and killed by militants throughout FATA. As a result, they were followed by the rise of the Mulla (cleric), who became the loyal subordinate to the tribal chief and assumed the crucial role of bridging the gap between the local community and the authorities, specifically the Political Agents and Army commanders. Additionally, it is worth noting that the commanders of local militant groups took on the ancestral responsibility of mediating tribal disputes, a role historically fulfilled by the Maliks. Such strategies "have seriously weakened the status and effectiveness of the traditional structure that had long been delivering in tribal life before 9/11 resulted in all this (Group, 2009).

### **The role of the *Jirga System* (Council of Tribal Elders)**

Militancy has profoundly altered the tribal Jirga, an ancient system for conflict resolution. Notably, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) replaced Hujra with mosques, perceiving it as a threat to their its existence. Despite this, Hujra has remained a vital part of tribal life. Once revered for resolving disputes and issues within tribes and communities, the Jirga now relies on the Mullah for enforcement, whereas it used to be upheld by the tribes' Maliks and respected elders (‘Āmir Rānā et al., 2010). The Jirga evaluated the issues based on local customs and legal frameworks, while militants enforced an excessively rigid interpretation of Islam. Eventually, the Jirga was substituted by the Shura, where militants would arbitrarily settle local conflicts.

### **Attan (Traditional Dance)**

Attan, a traditional tribal dance, is performed by both men and women to the rhythmic beats of local drums, popularly known as 'Dohl'. It holds a special place in the cultural gatherings of the tribal communities, often followed by lively musical programs. Attan is cherished and widely celebrated in the tribal belt for its captivating performances and vibrant traditions. According to Rafiuddin Kakar, Attan “began to disappear during the Afghan war and, in particular, as a result of the localization of the Taliban following the outrageous incident of 9/11 (Khan et al., 2019). After the militants outlawed music, "the familiar beat of Attan Dhol faded away and its beats are hardly heard in public places (Khan et al., 2019).

### **Assessing the Socio-Political and Economic effects of Military Operations in FATA**

Initially, terrorist activities were confined to the Agencies and FRs. However, over time, these militants expanded their networks and began targeting civilians and law enforcement personnel. In response, military operations were launched to eradicate the militants and dismantle their hideouts. It is worth mentioning that conducting operations in the challenging terrain of FATA, against an adversary blended with the local population, posed a significant challenge. Furthermore, the militants skillfully manipulated Islam and Pashtunwali to entice locals to join what they portrayed as a righteous struggle. This placed a considerable burden on Pakistani authorities, particularly in shaping their own narrative. It is crucial to acknowledge the oppressive tactics employed by militants against the indigenous people. They imposed a distorted version of Islam, exploiting religion to further their own political agendas. They encouraged the local population to unite and engage in





violent jihad, promising heavenly rewards in return. Those who resisted joining the fight against the Pakistan Army were falsely accused and subjected to persecution. Numerous residents of the formerly known FATA region, who were interviewed for this study, affirmed that militants propagated the belief that jihad was the sole pathway to Jannah (paradise).

The Taliban, according to Akhtar Khan, a lecturer, and resident of Wana South Waziristan, "sold the local youth the heaven dream in lieu of surrendering their life for the glory of Islam". He adds that "boys were told that Pakistan Army personnel are not true Muslims and that they are liable to be killed because they are aiding America." Moreover, "the idea of suicide, which was originally deemed illicit in Islam, was not only authorized but also presented an act of ultimate holiness. Qari Hussain was a famous suicide bomber recruiter within the ranks of the TTP Taliban" claims Alamzaib Mehsud, a human rights activist and working for the recovery of missing person, "...even the phonetics of words were altered (Suicide became Fidai) to improve social understanding and fit best within the social structure." During military operations against local militants in erstwhile FATA, the focus extended beyond targeting those specific militant groups. Efforts were also made to raise awareness about the malicious intentions of the Taliban. In doing so, they aimed to improve the writing quality of their approach, enhance readability, optimize word choice, and uphold an eloquent manner while conveying the original meaning. According to Akhtar Khan, who was responding to a question, "Erstwhile FATA residents learned the precise identity of the Taliban after moving to other regions of the country as a result of army operations. They understood that the Taliban were fighting for financial gains and had no connection to Islam (Khan, 2022)

When questioned about the locals' opposition, the interviewees explained that initially, they were hesitant to support military operations due to their ideological leanings and misconceptions about Islam. However, their perspective changed as they engaged with the outside world and began to think more critically. Alamzaib Mehsud highlighted that the people of the former FATA started thinking innovatively and logically. To combat terrorism in the region, they joined forces with the Pakistan Army, realizing that a combination of strength and collaboration is crucial in addressing such challenges (Mahsud, 2022).

The significant issue of mass displacement among tribesmen emerged as a consequence of military operations. A majority of survey participants expressed the belief that migration and displacement had positive impacts on the cultural orientation of tribesmen. Upon settling in new habitats, tribesmen were able to assimilate and embrace new attributes.

According to Alamzaib Mehsud, "People were forced to live their lives in line with the customs of new urban communities after moving to alien surroundings. They were compelled to develop new ways of thinking and ethos because individuals in their new habitats used to make fun of their characteristics and ways of life (Mahsud, 2022). Rahim Dawar was of the view that since they were "exposed to the outside ecosystem through



human contact in cities and towns, they had become more culturally and religiously secularized.” They changed the way they behaved and, ultimately, began to act differently (Dawar., 2022) Most respondents agreed that as people migrated to big cities, their fashion choices transformed. This shift was evident in men, who started wearing formal trousers and jeans. Women, on the other hand, frequented malls and shops located outside their localities. It is worth noting that such experiences were entirely new to the people of erstwhile FATA. Furthermore, due to military operations, the deep-seated conservatism that once prevailed in the former FATA region has significantly waned. Peace and order have been successfully reinstated in the Tribal Areas. Non-Governmental Organizations, previously associated with Western support, are now not only embraced but also held in high esteem by the local population. Moreover, efforts have been made to foster and promote the indigenous culture in various facets. Taha Sadiqqi was of the view that “cultural traits like Mehfil, Rabab, Hujra, and Adabi Sangar were given due importance after the elimination of terrorist hideouts through military operations (Sadiqqi, 2022). The extensive impact of displacements on the war-affected people of the Tribal Areas is evident. Gaining exposure to previously uncharted territories not only raises awareness but also offers the potential for developing more effective peace-building strategies. The invaluable insights from this previously inaccessible world can now inform and shape a more inclusive pathway toward lasting peace.

These insightful local voices shed light on how residents bravely confronted militants and the military. They also highlight the challenges encountered by the Pakistan Army when operating in these areas.

Military operations have played a crucial role in terminating militant groups, though their impact on the socio-political landscape of former FATA has been profound. The cultural fabric and identity of tribesmen have indeed been influenced by these military actions. When asked about the consequences of such operations, the majority of respondents believed that tribal cultural symbols were portrayed in a negative light. Alamzaib Mehsud informed that “the cultural attire, including Chadar, Shalwar, Pagri (Turban) and Qamees, was presented as one of manifestations and hallmarks of terrorists (Mahsud, 2022). As a result of this misrepresentation, the local community experienced feelings of stigmatization and isolation (Khan, 2022). During Pakistan's military operations in former FATA, core cultural attributes like 'Namos' and 'Ghiarat' suffered degradation. Dr.Gulalam Wazir says that “markets and cultural heritage were destroyed in Operation Zarb-e-Azab...auctioning of the markets of the people hurt their sentiments, and they considered that as a bargain of their honor, not that of their goods.” He further stated that “people were compelled to live in dire conditions in refugee camps. People took it as an offense to their honor. Similarly, due to the maltreatment of the people, they considered themselves as second-class citizens (Wazir, 2022). With that being said, although these concerns hold validity, it is crucial to acknowledge that the government had limited options at that time, leading to the establishment of IDP camps. Similarly, markets suffered destruction as they were exploited by terrorists as hideouts and storage facilities. However, the authorities struggled to



effectively communicate and engage with local communities, resulting in a significant level of mistrust.

When considering the effects of military operations on women, the participants noted that Pashtuns exhibit unwavering determination in protecting their women. Alamzaib Mehsud stated that “we deemed it like burning in the flames of hell to see our women insulted in refugee camps and check posts, and we preferred to die at that moment.” Likewise, according to him, “it was against tribal honor to see their women at registration centers and ration points.” He argued that “the people of erstwhile FATA can forget anything, but they cannot forget an insult of their womenfolk (Mahsud, 2022).

Most of the locals that were interviewed were of the opinion that the state rightly stereotyped terrorist groups, but in this “process of stereotyping, the people of erstwhile FATA were stigmatized. The word “tribal” carried a negative connotation in the urban areas of Pakistan (Wazir., 2023) said Razaq Wazir. Alamzaib Mehsud added that in “movies and different mock security drills, the terrorists were shown in tribal attire, which portrayed a violent image of the tribal people. This was compounded by the difficulties associated with embracing the urban way of life (Mahsud, 2022).

These interviews reveal the challenges faced by the tribesmen as they grappled with the realization that extraordinary circumstances gave rise to their own set of problems. Unfortunately, the recurring issue of insensitivity towards the sentiments of the locals hinders Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts. To win the hearts and minds of the people, the state must exhibit greater sensitivity moving forward. Furthermore, it is crucial for the authorities to involve the locals extensively in the reform and rehabilitation processes in erstwhile FATA, considering that they are the primary stakeholders in need of substantial and positive transformation.

### **Conclusion**

It is crucial to acknowledge that the socio-political landscape of the former FATA has been significantly shaped by both militancy and military operations. Exploiting the indigenous cultural ethos, militant groups sought sanctuary within the tribal society. To legitimize their presence and strengthen their networks, these militants not only distorted but also replaced the established cultural and political institutions such as Maliks, Jirga, and Hujra. These profound transformations introduced extremism to a once tranquil tribal society, while also undermining local institutions. Furthermore, the militants posed an eminent and existential security threat to the State of Pakistan.

The military operations carried out against various militant networks had a singular goal: to restore order and stability to the Tribal Areas. However, these operations had both positive and negative consequences on the cultural and political fabric of the tribal society. On the positive side, kinetic operations revitalized cultural activities in the Tribal Areas and effectively quashed the threat of terrorism and militancy. Additionally, those who migrated



to urban cities in Pakistan embraced the modern urban culture, an entirely new experience for them. Furthermore, interactions with people from different backgrounds exposed the erstwhile FATA residents to diverse perspectives, fostering cultural and religious openness. Military operations in the tribal society had detrimental effects on the local cultural and political ethos. Apart from collateral damage, the treatment of elders, particularly women, at check posts, rations points, and IDP camps violated cultural norms. Historic markets, representing cultural heritage and cherished sentiments, were demolished and auctioned off. The word 'tribal' became synonymous with 'terrorist'. The people of erstwhile FATA endured immense hardships during the decade-long war on terror. In addition to the negative impacts of militancy, the socio-political fabric of FATA also suffered from the repercussions of military interventions.

However, such circumstances could have been averted by embracing comprehensive counterterrorism and Countering Violence Extremism (CVE) strategies. This is primarily because while Pakistan has made considerable progress in combatting terrorism and militancy through the use of force, there remains a substantial journey ahead before the nation can claim definitive success in eradicating these phenomena. To accomplish this, Pakistan must implement a range of reforms to enhance the security and resilience of the tribesmen residing in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, safeguarding them from manipulation.

The research findings offer valuable insights for future academic investigations on terrorism and militancy in the Tribal Areas. They shed light on the limited effectiveness of certain policy interventions and highlight the potential of alternative approaches. As the Tribal Areas are poised to be integrated into national development, it becomes crucial to thoroughly assess past successes and failures. This research, informed by the experiences of local communities, serves as a significant starting point for this vital and necessary endeavor.



### References:

- Afsar, S. A., Samples, C. A., & Gregg, H. S. (2008). *The evolution of the Taliban*. Citeseer.
- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Pakistan's Tribal Areas: Appeasing the Militants.* "Crisis Group Asia Report, no. 125, December 11, 2006. Retrieved from.
- Chan, A. B. (2009). file:///C:/Users/Registrar Office/Downloads/scholar (4).ris. *Asian Affairs, an American Review*, 36(1), 51.
- Chughtai, M. W. (2013). The Impact of Rising Terrorism and Military Operations on Socio Economic Culture of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. *A Journal of Peace and Development*, 3(1), 18–32.
- Dawar., R. (2022, December 13). Interviewed with Rahim Dawar. M.Phil. scholar from Government College University, Lahore. (T. Marwat, Interviewer)
- Elahi, F. (2022). Terrorism in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 6(II), 1003–1013. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022\(6-ii\)85](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022(6-ii)85)
- Group, I. C. (2009). *Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge*. International Crisis Group.
- ‘Amir Rānā, M., Sial, S., & Basit, A. (2010). *Dynamics of Taliban insurgency in FATA*. Pak Institute for Peace Studies.
- Khan, S., Wazir, T., & Khan, A. (2019). The effects of militancy and military operations on Pashtun culture and traditions in FATA. *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, 3(1), 74–84.
- Khan, A. (2022, December, 5). Interview with Akhtar Khan. Lecturer in Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KPK. (T. Marwat, Interviewer)
- Mahsud, A. (2022, December 11). interviewed with Alamzaib Mehsud. Human Right Activist in Waziristan. (T. Marwat, Interviewer)
- Sial, S. (2010). Patters of talibanization in Fata. *Muhammad Amir Rana, Safdar Sial, and Abdul Basit, Dynamics of Taliban Insurgency in Fata, Pak Institute for Peace Studies*, 143.
- Siddique, A. (2014). *The Pashtun question: The unresolved key to the future of Pakistan and Afghanistan*. Hurst & Company.
- Sadiqqi, T. (2022, December 22). Interviewd with Taha Sadiqqi. Journalist. .
- Taj, F. (2011). *Taliban and anti-Taliban*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- ur Rehman, G. S. (2015). Pashtunwali and Islam: the conflict of authority in the traditional Pashtun society. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 35(1), 297–307.
- Wazir, G. (2022, December 26). Interview with Gulalam Wazir. Political Activist in Waziristan. .
- Wazir., R. (2023, January 3). Interview with Razaq Wazir. Teacher at Government school, Domal.