

Talibanization in NWFP – Pakistan & Our Response

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Background of the Problem:

Since the Russian expulsion from Afghanistan, Pakistan has been a direct victim of terrorism. During the Afghan – Russian war, a huge number of Afghan citizens migrated to Pakistan; and Pakistan being Muslim brother, instead of keeping the refugees allowed them to move in every direction of Pakistan. Though initially refugee camps hosted the Afghans, but in order to keep a large number in those camps became impossible. Therefore, unofficially, Afghans were allowed to move around easily.

Consequently, just like citizens of Pakistan, the Afghans swiftly entered into normal life and get hold of food business and truck-driver jobs. With the passage of time, other than becoming part of the Pakistani society; they also became active in illegal sale of arms and narcotics. This was the time when sectarian groups were busy in killing other sectarian groups in the name of Islam. The then president, Gen. Zia-ul-Haq could not stop these sectarian killings, despite introducing Constitutional reforms and amending several articles in accordance with Islamic *Shari'ah*, besides introducing new Islamic laws such as Qisas and Diyat law, Law of evidence, Hadd Ordinances etc. Gen. Zia also targeted non-Muslims and cut them off from main stream politics.

The buyers of illegal weapons, especially klashenkov were the sectarian groups; and there were several people who started partnership for illegal drugs with Afghans.

The *jihadis* were busy in fighting in Afghanistan against Russian forces; Pakistan fought a proxy war for USA along with Saudi Arabia taking care of financial needs. However, when Russians went back, the Afghan refugees could not go back due to the civil war among war-lords. During this struggle Taliban emerged as a strongest group which took hold of Afghanistan. Taliban, (sing. Talib) literary meaning students, prove to be Islamic fundamentalists, who were not ready for any concession in their understanding towards women and non-Muslims. They did not even allow males to shave their beard. They had their own brand of Islam, very stubborn and non-accommodative; demolition of Buddha statues in Bamiyan can be another example of their brutal attitude.

Since 9/11, the role of the Talibans became more suspicious and US directly blamed them for this destruction and waged a war on them and attacked Afghanistan. Pakistan as frontline ally was there to facilitate the US forces.

This situation let Pakistan into another phase of sufferings. Pakistani-backed Talibans were now confronting Pakistan and US forces and very soon they were forced to flee from Afghanistan and Mullah Omar and Osama-bin-Laden are still at large.

Since Talibans had no particular occupation in Afghanistan, majority of them preferred Pakistan to reside, some of them being Pakistani and others were not accepted by their home-countries and they started living in tribal areas situated at Pak-Afghan boarder. Talibans were then engaged against US

troops in Afghanistan and they also decided to teach a lesson to Pakistani government, supporting US army.

This point leads to another phase of terrorism in Pakistan. Previously sectarianism destructed the peace situation; now Pakistan's role against Talibans brought further destruction.

Suicidal attacks in Pakistan.

During sectarian killings, a different strategy was seen. In various places time-bombs or remote control bombs were used. However, after 9/11 a new wave of suicide bombing was witnessed, which continues till today. Previously there was an opportunity to capture the person and explosive material could be defused. However, now it is quite difficult to capture the suicide bomber. Though at times bombers were captured but most of them blew them off. Thus security personals and other responsables are threatened by such people.

If we go back the history of suicidal attacks in Pakistan we find that the first suicide attack occurred in the capital, Islamabad in 1995, when the bomber rammed his explosives-laden truck into the embassy of Egypt, which killed 14 people. The motives of this attack were purely not liked with Pakistan and the bomber was also an Egyptian.

The first Pakistani suicide bomber attacked the French engineers outside Sheraton Hotel, Karachi in May 2002. 14 people including 11 French engineers were killed in this attack.

On 14th June, 2002 another suicide bomber detonated his explosive-laden truck outside American consulate in Karachi, which killed 12 people.

During 2003, only one suicide attack took place, which targeted Gen. Pervez Musharat, the then president of Pakistan.

The year 2004 experienced five suicide attacks including one in Attock on the country's prime minister Shaukat Aziz. In other attacks 57 people were killed.

In 2005, 31 people were killed in two suicide attacks in different places.

A total number of suicide attacks increased in 2006; this year six attacks took place which killed 140 people. During this year American embassy and Pakistani security forces were the prime targets.

The number of suicide attacks increased in 2007; this year 47 suicide attacks took place killing 538 people including former PM Benazir Bhutto, who was finally caught by the terrorists this year.

Suicide bombings in 2008 surpassed the last year's figures, with 61 attacks, killing at least 889 people.

So far (till March) in 2009, 7 attacks have killed 173 people on the spot.

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Victims	23	5	57	31	140	538	889	173

The war against terrorism has cost 1,856 lives of innocent citizens of Pakistan. This figure is different than the sectarian killings in mosques, *Imam bargas* and other direct killing of religious scholars of various sects. Therefore, war against terror has taken away the bread winners of several families and number of indirect affectees raises to several thousands; similarly sectarianism has not taken away the peace and spirituality, but it also has taken away a substantial number of learned religious scholars from our community.

US Drone Attacks on Pakistan

Pakistan is an important ally in US-led war against terrorism; simultaneously Pakistan has to face the opposition of Talibans as well. A substantial number of Talibans resides in Pakistan, therefore, in order to follow them from Afghan boarder, US Drone, pilot-less aircrafts have flown over Pakistan's territory and have killed several people. However, it is necessary to note that a large number of civilians were killed. Of the 60 cross-border strikes between January 14, 2006 and April 8, 2009 only 10 were able to hit their actual targets, killing 14 wanted al-Qaeda leaders and 701 Pakistani civilians.

Year	Drone Attacks	Required Targets	Civilian Casualties
2006	2	-	98
2007	3	-	66
2008	36	14	385
2009	14	-	152

This table clearly shows that the Drones and the US authorities were misguided and the bombardment continued on fake information. Despite a lot of criticism, the US has indicated that it will likely increase its usage of drones and expand the list of targets that they are attacking, which is horrifying the innocent citizens of concerned areas; neither US authorities nor government of Pakistan has shown any regrets on these unjust killings. Furthermore, these attacks also provide a base to so-called *jihadis* to attack law enforcing agencies in the region. Most recently Talibans have enlarged their circle of action and now they are even operating in far flung areas. Attach on a police academy, Lahore is an example to show the sensitivity of the issue. This is also one of the major reasons that a large number residents of NWFP are now forced to migrate to other parts of the country.

Bombing the Girl's Schools Barber & CD Shops; & Other Official Buildings

Talibans being self-proclaimed custodians of promulgating the Islamic law in the region have taken several steps by their own; whatever meanings others may give to their steps, they are not going to pay any attention to it. Rather in return they claim opposing group being un-Islamic. Their self-righteousness urges to bulldoze every single attempt against them.

The Pakistani Talibans, comprising of groups like Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi and Tehrik-e-Taliban, warned the girls, that they will not be allowed to go to schools after January 15. Government of Pakistan took a serious note of this warning and deployed army and para-military troops outside schools, just to avoid any action. Despite these measures, a large number of schools were blown up by Talibans. Resources claim that during past two years, scores of girl's schools, and government buildings have been blown in Swat, Bajaur and Mohmand agency.

According to reports during 2008, Taliban destroyed 162 girl's schools and about 88 boys' schools have been torched in Swat. They initially banned co-education and elite schools and later secular education was completely banned. Taliban have also warned people to take care of their female siblings. No woman is allowed to move without close male relatives; no public gatherings of women and men are allowed; girls over the age of seven years have to be veiled, otherwise their throats will be cut off. The dress code by Taliban is not limited to females, they recently (Jan. 22) killed a teacher and hanged his body from an electricity pole in Mingora. The teacher was alleged to refuse to follow their dress code. The Taliban want all men to wear traditional clothes and beard.

This leads to another form of victimization, that majority of the barber shops have been closed due to the threats from Taliban. Those who dare to open it, have clearly mentioned that these shops are for hair-cut alone. No other services are provided. Same is the position of CD shops, which have been either blown up or closed with the fear. This step reminds of the measures of Taliban in Afghanistan when they also banned all sorts of music, singing and dancing in the country. There were also news about killing of artists in Afghanistan during that period and several artists fled to Pakistan and other neighboring countries. Taliban in Pakistan are also trying to do the same thing in controlled areas.

Peace Treaty between Sufi Muhammad and Government of Pakistan in SWAT Valley

The government of Pakistan after failing to keep peace in NWFP, especially in Swat and other adjacent areas; were forced to have a peace treaty¹ with Sufi Muhammad. This treaty was presented on February 16, 2009; it was also between other fractions of Pakistani Taliban, especially Sufi Muhammad's son-in-law Fazalullah. The nine-point treaty is; the Taliban would support

- 1) the polio vaccination campaign in their areas
- 2) education for girls;
- 3) every effort by government to establish law and order in the region;
- 4) Taliban would wrap-up training facilities for militants;
- 5) they will also stop making weapons;
- 6) the district administration in any operation against anti-State elements;
- 7) Taliban will stop carrying weapons in open by followers of Sufi Muhammad and Fazlullah

the Taliban will be allowed to:

- 8) continue broadcasting FM radio programs;
- 9) government will 'look' for legal ways to withdraw cases against the clerics.

Situation of non-Muslims under Taliban²

The warlike situation in the province and prolonged curfews has put the Christians and Hindus living in NWFP in an unbearable situation. Majority of the Christians and Hindus are linked

¹ http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/07/swat_joins_talibanis.php

² some information has been shared from the news letter *The Frontier News: Diocese of Peshawar, Church of Pakistan*, 1 Sir Syed Road, Peshawar Cantt.

with janitorial jobs, which require working during early hours. However, due to curfews and other restrictions on mobility they are unable to continue their work. Furthermore, as majority is also government employees, they did not receive their salaries, as the local government is not getting local taxes such as toll-tax, just because of road blockages and desertedness. Consequently, the non-Muslim families are leading a miserable life, facing a lot of social problems there.

Since the shortage of food items, the prices have gone high above, therefore, these families are unable to get required amount of food. Other popular profession is teaching, in which Christians are involved. With the closure of schools, being bombarded or taken by army for camps, again the community is serving the most.

There are a large amount of families who have migrated to other parts of the country. The irony is that these displayed people are neither accepted by government-based camps nor any other organization made any arrangements for their settlement. It is learnt that these people have settled with their other poor relatives, where they cannot live for a longer period; or at least till the issue is resolved to their hometowns.

Those who are still living the NWFP are facing threats regularly from various groups. A Deacon in Kohat received threatening phone calls to leave the church compound; later due to certain reasons he left the area and migrated along with his family.

Fr. Sohail Patrick, the parish priest of the Catholic Church, Kohat continuously receives threatening telephone calls and letters. However, he is determined to stay there and along with support of Muslim influential friends, he stays in the parish.³

Therefore, life is not easy as Christians continue struggling to survive; previously for livelihood and now for security and endurance. The situation can be analyzed with the recent statement of a Sikh spokesman, who were forced to leave their homes, business and property because they were not able to pay *jaziya* (religious tax as described in Islam). The Sikh spokesman told the media that we have left our hometown, because a fight between Talibans and government has lapsed life in Aurakzai. However, the reports tell that Talibans asked for Rs. 200 million (US\$ 1 = Rs. 80) as *jazia*, and on non-payment all Sikh families were forced to leave the area. These families were living there for almost 300 years and they were neither settlers like Talibans nor refugees, but still they have to leave the area.

Conclusion:

This is not for the first time that we are facing Islamization in Pakistan; prior to this, Objectives Resolution was also an attempt where Islamic laws were introduced. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1973-1977) declared Islam to be State religion; he nationalized mission educational and health institutes; and at later stage he changed weekly off day to Friday and tried to bring Islam into social life. The biggest effort was made by Gen. Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988), who through Constitutional amendments changed the entire appearance of the Constitution.

³ For further details see: *Human Rights Monitor 2008: A Report on the Religious Minorities in Pakistan*, National Commission for Justice & Peace, Lahore.

However, history proves that all these attempts were not successful. It simply disturbed the social life in Pakistan and the most affected were the religious minorities and women. Consequently, our country started becoming weak and we could not grow as a stronger nation.

Previously there have been violations of human rights, lack of protection to women. Though religious minorities were not living a lavish life in NWFP, but they were living a peaceful life as compared to other parts of the country. However, so far we have seen that Talibans in Swat, Malakand and other areas of their intervention have not maintained peace as before. There are reports of a large number of abduction, killings of security personals and government officials, confining women behind veil and walls, threatening NGOs and their staff, especially (even killings of) female staff, and maltreatment of the religious minorities.

Now Sufi Muhammad has an open hand to reform the society in Swat in accordance with Islamic laws. After signing the peace treaty there will be no hindrances for him, therefore, he also has an opportunity to show the bright teachings of Islam in practice and make Swat a peaceful land. According to his previous claims he wants to build a society just like Prophet Muhammad (SAW) after His migration to Medinah, which became an ideal city in every respect.