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TEHRIK-I-TALIBAN PAKISTAN: A PHENOMENON OF TERRORISM IN PAKISTAN



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ABSTRACT

Terrorism has lately become a global threat and it has destabilised many countries. Pakistan has also suffered from the same fate and saw resurgence of some Taliban groups after it became an ally in the War on Terror. Among these Taliban groups the threat of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) stands potent. The main aim of this group is to establish Sharia (Islamic law) in Pakistan and fight against the western imperialism and many innocent lives are being lost to establish this. Though they are basically fighting against the Pakistani state and the army, they are also sympathisers of the Afghan Taliban and the cause of global jihad. Initially TTP started as an umbrella group of several Talibans but it could hardly coordinate because of the difference of interests among the group and the personal clashes among the leaders. Thus from this aspect the paper will try to find the cause of the formation of TTP

and its position in the power struggle both within the state and in the international scenario.

KEYWORDS :Terrorism, Pakistan, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION :

The world has recently witnessed various trends and transformations with new actors coming to the fore. The international politics, which was



more concerned with the interaction among states and their internal matters, are now dealing with the non-state actors also. Some of these actors, which have come in form of threats, are not only challenging the individual states but the world scenario at a large. The globalised world which was anticipated to connect the world and have a common cosmopolitan culture is facing non-traditional threats from the issues of ethnic and sectarian conflicts, terrorism, environmental degradation etc. Among these threats the issue of terrorism stands potent which have destabilised the world and have jeopardised the security of the globe.

There are different explanations of terrorism but the psychological, socio-economic and

ideological factors are often identified as major reasons for the cause of terrorism (Chatterjee 2010). A political reference can also become an important reason. As the cause varies so a well accepted definition of terrorism is very difficult to achieve. As Jackson and Sorenson (2010) say-“terrorism is the unlawful use or threatened use of violence against civilians, often to achieve political, religious or similar objectives.” Jackson and Sorenson (2010) have further pointed one very important thing in this respect that most terrorism has a national reference. They have emphasised on the fact that in states where the “democratic politics is weak or absent” terrorism becomes a tool for political struggles.

At the same time it should be remembered that with the rise of globalisation, terrorism has become a global phenomenon. The modern technologies have increased the ability of terrorist groups to work together in a more connected network especially for the groups fighting a common cause. Likewise after 9/11 the issue of terrorism took shape of a global threat where the United States of America wedged a “War on Terror” on Afghanistan where Pakistan became its ally as a frontline state. As a consequence of this a special group of Taliban came to the fore in Pakistan calling them Pakistani Taliban or Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Pakistan, which is already facing numerous challenges starting from establishing a well functioning democracy to curbing ethnic and sectarian tensions, is now faced with the severe problem of terrorism. Each day people are being killed jeopardising the basic existence of the state. Among the other Taliban groups, TTP stands as a potent one claiming most of the attacks from targeting the school in Peshawar to shooting of the young activist Malala Yousafzai. TTP has a strong Deobandi and Sunni ideological leanings and its aim is to “impose Islamic Law in Pakistan and the entire world, to fight imperialist powers fighting against Muslims in Afghanistan and around the world, to fight disbelievers and to wage jihad against the Pakistani state and Pakistan Army” (TTP, Stanford University).

Thus in this respect the paper will try to make an analysis that what were the reasons for growth of this group of Taliban and the main cause of their existence. Further the paper will also look into its international connections and try to comprehend their role in the power struggle.

CONCEPTUALISING THE ISSUE

The word terrorism comes from the Latin word ‘terrere’ which means to frighten. Terrorism is basically use of force or threat of use of force against both the combatants and non combatants in order to inculcate fear as a means of achieving their goals. Thus terrorism’s basic difference with the war is the question of legitimacy (Bajpai 2012).

While finding the cause of terrorism three schools of thoughts can be stated here as mentioned by Kanti Bajpai (2012). The first is the liberal school of thought which believes that terrorism is a reaction to political, economic, social and cultural deprivation. As it is the government who is responsible for the distribution of these resources, the terrorists often rebel against it as they feel the state is unable to execute or refuse to give opportunities to rectify the inequalities among the societies. In this respect the target of the group is the state. Conservatives sees terrorism as a consequence of “natural stress and strain of nation building”. As a country goes under unification its new laws and rules threatens some groups. These groups then may adopt violence as a means of resistance. The realist says that due to the competition in the international scenario the issue of terrorism may arise as an act of ensuring power by use of violent means which can produce quick results.

The political connotation of explaining the issue also becomes very important. As James D. Kiras (2014) have mentioned that the groups often have “multiple grievances and compete with one another for resources and support.” Further he mentions that terrorism is designed to achieve political change as the aim to obtain power and regulate things in their direction. Their concept of change is usually

based on some radical ideas and lack support base. Similarly the attacks of the Pakistani Taliban, as Kiras (2014) have mentioned, can be defined as “the use of violence by sub-state groups to inspire fear, by attacking civilians and symbolic targets, for purposes such as drawing widespread attention to a grievance, provoking a severe response, or wearing down their opponent’s moral resolve, to effect political change”.

Along with these explanations the cultural concept of global jihad has also come to define the issue of International Terrorism. The incident of 9/11 brought resurgence of religion in international affairs. As Huntington mentions that the global world is marked with “Clash of Civilisations” and at the core of civilisation resides the religion. Thus once again the world saw the resurgence of religious aspect in politics (Cited in Jackson and Sorenson 2010). The aspect of global jihad is an attempt to safeguard the culture of the Muslim world against the western impact of globalisation which is making a more connected secular democratic world. Many of the state centric terrorist groups like TTP are sympathising if not actively participating in it making terrorism a more connected and interrelated aspect. Thus terrorism became a more coordinated effort with weapons of mass destruction, making it more lethal (Kiras 2014).

The Creation of Pakistani Taliban

Pakistan’s decision for becoming a frontline state in “War on Terror” brought a group to wedge against the state and fight against the western imperialism in the name of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. After 2007 thirteen groups came under this one umbrella organisation of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) with Baitullah Mehsud as its head. The basic aim of TTP was to unite these militant groups against the NATO action of Afghanistan and also to wedge a war against the Pakistani forces (TTP Profile). The groups like “Harkatul Jihad Al Islami, Qari Saifullah Akhtar Group, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Tehrik-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi, Tehrik-e-Taliban Punjab, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and some Chechen and German-Turk groups” formed coalition under the banner of this Pakistani Taliban (Chistai 2014). Since its formation Pakistan has been facing several attacks causing highest number of terrorism related deaths in the world according to the START Global Terrorism Database (Mehmood 2016).

After the American attack on Afghanistan in 2001 the prevailing Taliban regime collapsed in the country. Most of the Taliban headed to the Quetta region of Balochistan in Pakistan. The Pakistani sympathisers gave the Al-Qaeda members shelter especially in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region of Pakistan. As Abubakar Siddique (2014) has pointed out that it is not that the movement of the Pakistani Taliban was not active before 9/11, he points that the movement was already active in Afghanistan and the Taliban came back to Pakistan after the end of the Kabul regime. A few new Taliban were the natives of the Waziristan area and most of them were part of either Islamist political organisations or were individual members of the Afghan Taliban Movement. Basically in the Waziristan region of FATA the militants came and took shelter. The people who hailed from this region welcomed the other members. Apart from that it was quite easy for the group to hide in the high terrains, desert and forest areas of the region. The Pakistani military force was unable to curb the intrusion of the militants. In the FATA region the easy access was mainly because initially there was hardly any military action taking place. By 2002 in South Waziristan there were many refugees coming from the Central Asian and Arab countries through the porous borders. These areas which were called agencies were familiar to the Afghan Taliban. They were having common tribal ties, taught in the Pakistani madrasas since 1980s, they became an important part of the society in these areas. There were also a number of recruits from these areas of Pakistan in the group of Afghan Taliban till the Taliban was in power in Afghanistan. The reluctance of the Pakistani military to curb the extremism in these tribal areas also

helped recover the Al-Qaeda.

After tremendous international pressure on Pakistan in 2004 the war between the army and the militants started. These military action against the extremists helped to gain them support in the tribal areas and they became powerful than the tribal heads and the local administrators in the region. The fighting was initially in the Wana region of FATA but after the death of the local Taliban leaders in Wana it shifted to the Meshud region. The shift of this battle ground gave rise to two emerging leaders called Abdullallah and Baitullah Mehsud. Further in 2006 it gave rise to other leaders like Gul Bahadar and Maulana Sadiq Noor who have also fought in Afghanistan. Initially the objective of the Taliban was to secure the region where they can form a base camp for the war in Afghanistan. But due to turn of events, and international focus there were division among the Taliban who were guided by the economic and political interests where personal clashes became evident. The majority of Pakistani Taliban group united under one formal organisation of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (movement of Pakistani Taliban). Its membership were not only restricted to the FATA province but spread to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Punjab and Sindh provinces. This group though not hostile distanced themselves from the aim of the Afghan Taliban and they focused on the spreading sectarian violence and targeting the state agencies (Siddique 2014).

After its formation “a shura (consultative council) of forty senior Taliban leaders” was established to guide the working of the TTP in Pakistan. The TTP divided the tribal zones into administrative units which were headed by one military commander. The administrative units have different functions from “intelligence collection” to “identification and elimination of ‘spies,’ revenue collection, maintenance of law and order, and so on.” The new Taliban group grew mainly from the local settings with tribal affiliations. At the same time they coordinated with the other groups taking the common cause of fighting against the western imperialism and Pakistani state into reference (Siddique 2010:12)

It has often been observed that operations within the FATA and KPK by the security forces of Pakistan led many youths to join TTP for protection. As because these areas are poorly maintained by the government, many economically deprived people have also joined the TTP as they have been offered monetary prizes or given salary. Many Pakhtuns, living in the refugee camps have also joined the TTP for protection from the security personnel of Pakistan. Apart from these TTP had carried out many kidnapping where many people have been forcefully made the members of the group (Issue paper 2013). The use of psychological factor to fight for the religion against the satanic secular values of the west has also attracted membership for the group.

The Aim of the Group

As Dawn reports, though this group of Pakistani extremists called themselves Taliban, but their aim was not directly linked with the Afghan Taliban. They were basically fighting against the state of Pakistan and wanted to establish the sharia in the country. They are against the western notion of democracy and secularism and want to preserve religious orthodoxy in the area (Dawn 2012). This group of Taliban thinks Pakistan to be an ally of the western imperialism as Pakistan is the frontline state of war on terror.

As Hassan Abbas has mentioned that from sympathisers of the Afghan Taliban this group translated itself as a main stream force with small groups coordinating with each other. This has mainly happened when the military of Pakistan was finding the members of Al-Qaeda hiding in the area. As Pakistan declared more groups as illegal, they joined together under the banner of TTP fighting against the state. “During this period they developed their distinct identity. From their own perspective, they

intelligently created space for themselves in Pakistan by engaging in military attacks while at other times cutting deals with the Pakistani government to establish their autonomy in the area. By default they were accepted as a legitimate voice in at least two FATA agencies - South Waziristan and North Waziristan” (Siddique 2010:12).

The TTP not only established Sharia law in the tribal areas of FATA and in KPK but imposed a strict vigilance on establishing the orthodoxy of the religion. This group banned music, forbidden shaving of beard, education for women etc. Through the administrative councils of the shura they executed all these laws and also established Islamic courts. They said one has to adopt sharia or have to choose martyrdom. To implement the sharia rule they have attacked religious minorities and shia groups. The attacks on the shia groups were mainly done in the Kurram Agency in FATA which not only serves as a base to attack the Pakistan army but gives access to resources and a way to connect with the Afghan border (Issue paper 2013).

Thus their basic aim lies in imposing sharia and rejecting democracy in Pakistan waging jihad against the army and the west. Their further intends to supports the Afghan Taliban, fight against the Shias, talibanising the country where a parallel government can be made by the group based on Islamic Laws (Issue Paper 2012). Keeping these aims in mind they have carried out some major attacks in Pakistan. In 2009 they have bombed a mosque frequently visited by army personnel they have bombed natural gas stations and attacked on Sufi shrine claiming many lives. They have attacked the Army Public School of Peshawar (2014) (which they said was the protest against the military action in the tribal regions) and on teen activist Malala Yousufzai in 2012 (Brumfield and Naomi 2014). Through these incidents they have declared it was difficult to curb their aspiration to rule the state in their terms and conditions.

The Power Game and International Connections:

Though TTP has often denied their direct connection with the Afghan Taliban but it should be mentioned here that many of the leaders of this group said to have close association with Mullah Mohammad Omar and cooperates with the Afghan Taliban in spreading insurgency. Again many of the suicide bombers of Afghan Talibans were trained in the Pakistani soil. This group had a close relationship with the Haqqani network which is a hardcore affiliate with the Afghan Taliban (Gall,Walsh and Schorzmandec 2014).

Muhammad Amir Rana (2013) from Dawn reports that “Pakistani Taliban gains political legitimacy by associating themselves with the Afghan Taliban”. It should also be mentioned here that their ethnic and tribal affiliations were also sated as a reason for their links with the Afghan Taliban. It is said that before joining TTP every militant had to take oath of paying loyalty to Sharia and Mullah Omar. This was another strategy to gain legitimacy. Rana further reports that Baitullah Mehsud’s strategy was to operate as an anti state entity and to use ideological, socio-political, ethnic ties with Afghan Taliban to get international recognition. During the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, there were attempts to build a sharia system in Pakistan too and both the group believed in Deobandi sectarian teachings (Rana 2013). Further the group also gets financial assistance from Arab commanders and the Afghan Taliban (Chisti 2014).

Thus their international connections do not help in concluding that they have a complete ignorance with the ideological concept of global jihad. Dawn further reports that John Brennan, who is President Obama’s chief counter terrorism advisor, has mentioned TTP to be a closely linked ally of Al-Qaeda after the Time Square car bomb attempt by the group in 2010 (Dawn 2012). Thus an aspiration to be an international player is visible from its ideological references and functions.

The Pakistani Taliban aims to reach a political goal of establishing their authority as an important anti-state actor. They want the Pakistani constitution to be completely based on Islamic laws where they can regulate the country according to sharia. Thus in this respect the leadership of the groups also becomes important to coordinate the group work. But it has often been found that there is a tussle for power in the group. Because of this there are many splits found in the group. A section of Meshud tribe came out of TTP, and said their ideological goals were confronting with each other. The Meshud fraction claimed that the TTP is carrying out robbery and bombing in public places deviating from its actual cause. But it must be noted here that leadership crisis had began after the death Hakimullah Mehsud in 2013 (Hakimullah Meshud was the head after the death of Baitullah Meshud). Khalid Mehsud was a contender for the post but it was taken by Maulana Fazlullah who is not a part of this tribe and became a source for concern for the Meshud tribes (Sherazi 2014). The other fractions splitting from the core group also signifies that the sub groups want to secure their individual aims and bargain for their own group or themselves in the hierarchy of power. But some fractions were once again was united when the army of Pakistan launched operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan and other tribal areas to oust the Taliban. In March 2015, "Ehsanullah Ehsan, the spokesperson of Jamaat ul-Ahrar, issued a statement confirming the merging of TTP factions: We congratulate the Ummat-e-Muslima [the Muslim community] in common and especially the mujahideen of Pakistan for the coalition of strong jihadist groups, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan Jamaat ul-Ahrar, Tehrik-e-Lashkar-e-Islam and Tehrik-e-Taliban on one name Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan against the taghooti [satanic], infidel, democratic, unIslamic system and the Na-Pak Murtad [a Muslim who rejects Islam] Army" (Zahid 2015).

AN ATTEMPT TO COMPREHEND

Comprehending the cause of the rise of TTP in Pakistan, apparently it seems that the growth of this branch of the Taliban was an after effect of the military actions in the tribal regions. However from this study several reasons come to the fore. The economic factor and illiteracy can be one reason for the people to join the group, while ethnic and tribal affiliation can be another. The centralised state of Pakistan has favoured certain groups over the others especially ignoring this tribal part. Thus these areas served as a perfect base to rise against the state. This group have also the cultural cause of safeguarding their religion against the western imperialism and secularism propounded by democracy. But it should also be mentioned that forces like this have become one of the biggest actors within the state and the world where a mixed motive is observed. TTP has worked to gain its autonomy both within the state and over the world. Its link with the Afghan Taliban and the drive for leadership of different sections points towards the same. Thus terrorism was the best means which could have produced quick results for their recognition in the power struggle. The global link and the split in the group indicate how the group struggles to establish its authority or desires to be an important actor in the power hierarchy.

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