

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/04/20134983149771365.html>

Waziristan: 'The most dangerous place in the world'

Finding peace and securing stability in the Tribal Areas should be the first priority for the newly elected government.

Akbar Ahmed

4/12/2013

This article is the fifteenth in a series by Ambassador Akbar Ahmed, a former Pakistani high commissioner to the UK, exploring how a litany of volatile centre/periphery conflicts with deep historical roots were interpreted after 9/11 in the new global paradigm of anti-terrorism - with profound and often violent consequences. Incorporating in-depth case studies from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Ambassador Ahmed will ultimately argue that the inability for Muslim and non-Muslim states alike to either incorporate minority groups into a liberal and tolerant society or resolve the "centre vs periphery" conflict is emblematic of a systemic failure of the modern state - a breakdown which, more often than not, leads to widespread violence and destruction. The violence generated from these conflicts will become the focus, in the remainder of the 21st century, of all those dealing with issues of national integration, law and order, human rights and justice.

When a police convoy was stopped at a military checkpoint in Peshawar in northwestern Pakistan on March 29, a suicide bomber walked up to the vehicles and detonated the explosives strapped to his body. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the attack which killed 12 and injured a further 31.

With upcoming **elections in May**, this kind of violence emanating from the Tribal Areas, in particular Waziristan, the base of the TTP, can have a destabilising effect as the new civilian caretaker government, under the watchful eye of the military, attempts to establish its authority

across a country plagued by such attacks. And yet, the actions of both Pakistan and America are doing little to halt the violence.

American commentators, influenced by a notion of a "clash of civilisations" between Islam and the West, consistently pointed to al-Qaeda or a global jihad as the ideological forces driving the violence in the Tribal Areas. This assessment is, however, devoid of any social or historical context. With the US' full attention firmly fixated on this tribal periphery, it seemed that they knew everything yet understood nothing.

As our series with Al Jazeera has attempted to demonstrate, terrorism has very little to do with Islam. The "war on terror" is, instead, being driven by the confrontation between tribes on the periphery and their central governments across the Muslim world. After 9/11, the US, misunderstanding the centre and periphery dynamic, looked to the "ungoverned spaces" of the periphery in its hunt for al-Qaeda. US involvement exacerbated these historical conflicts, often through the bolstering of central government forces and the deployment of its drones to the core of tribal resistance.

Drone campaign in the Tribal Areas

At the heart of the America's drone campaign in the Tribal Areas, **referred** to by President Obama as "the most dangerous place in the world", is Waziristan and its main Pashtun tribes - the Wazir and the Mehsud. The buzzing of the drones overhead is a constant and terrifying presence for these tribes, with **drone strikes** occurring at an average of once every four days. Only 18 strikes in Pakistan, thus far, have been outside of Waziristan. As many as 3,400 people have died in these strikes. It is here, too, that the Pakistan Army has concentrated its military campaigns over the past nine years, campaigns which have been bogged down by the fierce resistance from the tribes.

To fully grasp the turmoil in Waziristan today, it is necessary to understand its tribes and their historical relationship with the centres of power in the Indian subcontinent and how all of these contributed to events after 9/11.

Waziristan for centuries was a land of mystery, an isolated region best avoided by the great conquerors of history - Alexander the Great and the Mughal emperors Akbar and Aurangzeb. It was a land of extremes: high mountains, dense forests, baking deserts, blistering temperatures in the summer and freezing winter winds. It was described by one British administrator as "a fortress built by nature for herself, guarded by mountains which serve it in the office of a wall".

Above all, it was the reputation of its prickly tribes which kept the invading armies at bay. Organised into clans defined by descent from a common ancestor, they lived by a code of honour called *Pashtunwali* and were traditionally governed by a council of elders, or *jirga*, which emphasised mediation as means of resolving conflict over the compulsions to revenge found within the code.

It was not until the establishment of British rule in the Indian subcontinent that the tribes of Waziristan would experience the imposition of any form of central rule. In order to govern the

tribes, the British Raj organised the border region into tribal agencies in the 1890s, appointing to each a political agent (PA) who would administer the tribes as a representative of the governor general. British authority, however, extended only a hundred yards on either side of the main road in the agency beyond which was the land of *riwaj*, or tribal customs. The tribes were able to maintain their ancient traditions, paid no taxes or rent, and were outside of the criminal and civil codes of the British government. In dealing with the tribes, the PA was aptly described as "half-ambassador and half-governor". He worked with the tribal and religious leadership, the elders and the mullahs, in order to maintain stability and deal with issues of law and order in the agency. This was a challenge which was not always successful, particularly in Waziristan with its fierce tribes.

Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of British India, struggled with finding a solution to restive Waziristan and once **stated** of this troublesome tribal region:

"No patchwork scheme - and all our present recent schemes, blockade, allowances, etc, are mere patchwork - will settle the Waziristan problem. Not until the military steam-roller has passed over the country from end to end, will there be peace. But I do not want to be the person to start that machine."

After the creation of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, its founding father known as Quaid-e-Azam ("great leader"), maintained the British civil structure of the tribal agency and the role of the political agent in administering the Tribal Areas.

Jinnah, however, would make the unprecedented move of **withdrawing** the military garrisons from Waziristan. In a meeting with a grand *jirga* from the tribes, he **assured** them that Pakistan would treat them:

"With absolute confidence and trust you as our Muslim brethren... Pakistan has no desire to unduly interfere with your internal freedom... We want to put you on your legs as self-respecting citizens who have the opportunities of fully developing and producing what is best in you and your land... It will certainly be my constant solicitude and indeed that of my Government to try to help you to educate your children."

With respect given and autonomy maintained, there was a general balance and peace between the centre and periphery. Most importantly, there were clear mechanisms in place, through the tribal structure, for dealing with problems of law and order. This system, by and large, maintained an often tenuous balance between the centre and periphery over the next five decades.

After the American invasion of Afghanistan, President Pervez Musharraf, under pressure from the Americans to capture those fleeing across the border into Waziristan, sent the Pakistan **military into the region** for the first time since Jinnah had withdrawn it. On television, Musharraf alluded to the presence of senior al-Qaeda leadership in Waziristan, prompting a full scale invasion in 2004. Ultimately, it would be a Pakistani president, not a British viceroy, who would implement the steamroller. It was now the military who was in control in the region, representing government authority for the tribes. In the difficult terrain and facing stiff

resistance, the military quickly became bogged down. What followed was a series of hastily constructed, temporary peace agreements in the region.

Violence in the Tribal Areas

All of this came to a head with the **assault on Lal Masjid**, or the Red Mosque, in Islamabad in July 2007. Its students had been detaining individuals, even policemen, who they deemed "un-Islamic" and attempting to establish sharia courts. After a gun battle with security forces, the students barricaded themselves inside the mosque. Elite Pakistani commandos stormed the ground, killing over a 100 people, including female students.

The Tribal Areas erupted in violence as nearly 70 percent of the students were from the Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In the following year, there were 88 bombings across Pakistan, killing 1,188 people and wounding a further 3,209. In one incident, the 18-year-old brother of one of the female students killed walked into the Tarbela Ghazi mess, south of Islamabad, and blew himself up, killing 22 commandos who had participated in the Lal Masjid raid.

Largely as a result of the Lal Masjid incident, the TTP was created in **December 2007** under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud from the most fearsome clan of the toughest tribe in Waziristan, the Shabi Khel of the Mehsud tribe. The TTP began a campaign of destruction with daring and deadly attacks across Pakistan, including attacks on Army General Headquarters and Mehran Naval Station in Karachi. A cycle of attacks and counter-attacks began between the Pakistan military and the TTP, which was motivated by tribal revenge.

What quickly became apparent from the actions of the TTP was a distinct mutation of the code. Its first targets were the very leaders of their own tribal society, the elders and mullahs. Entire *jirgas* were **kidnapped and killed**, and suicide bombers walked into mosques and **detonated their explosives**. No one was spared, not even innocent women and children. Without any mechanisms to control the impulses to revenge, unchecked violence reigned unrelieved by any peace agreements with the Pakistan government.

And then the drone was introduced into this chaotic landscape, pouring gasoline on an already out of control forest fire. Too many stories have leaked from the Tribal Areas of innocent groups of individuals killed by drone strikes, as anyone in the region became a suspected "militant".

Amidst the chaos and confusion, it is, however, the innocent tribesmen who suffer on all fronts, pounded by drone strikes and military campaigns one day, and suicide bombers the next. Some one million people have been **displaced** from the Tribal Areas because of the violence, including 200,000 Mehsud, nearly half of the population. An authoritative 2012 survey conducted in the Tribal Areas showed that while 79 percent opposed the actions of the US in Pakistan, 68 percent held negative views about al-Qaeda and 63 percent of the TTP. Half of those surveyed gave priority to education, stable employment, health schemes and reliable electricity.

With the presence of the Taliban groups and the Pakistani military in Waziristan, there is little semblance of stable leadership for the tribes with US drones making a bad situation worse. Besides halting the drone campaign, traditional tribal structures and a neutral civil administration

committed to the rule of law need to be returned in order to begin to re-establish peace and stability in this volatile periphery. Only by working through the traditional pillars of leadership and authority can the men of violence be effectively and permanently contained, as one of the authors discovered during his tenure in Waziristan as Political Agent.

Above all, the tribes of the periphery need to be dealt with effectively through maintaining law and order and being granted proper development schemes by their government. Pakistan should look to the example set by Jinnah, the Quaid-e-Azam, in how to positively interact with the tribes of Waziristan as well as the other communities of the periphery. The government, instead of funding military operations in Waziristan, should be funding education, medical facilities, stable electricity lines and other development projects.

If given positive opportunities, their dignity and rights as equal citizens, the security and unity of Pakistan will be in their own interests. Then, the people of Pakistan can work together to bring peace and stability to a country that has known little of these over the past decade. Finding peace and securing stability in the Tribal Areas should be the first priority for the newly elected government in May.