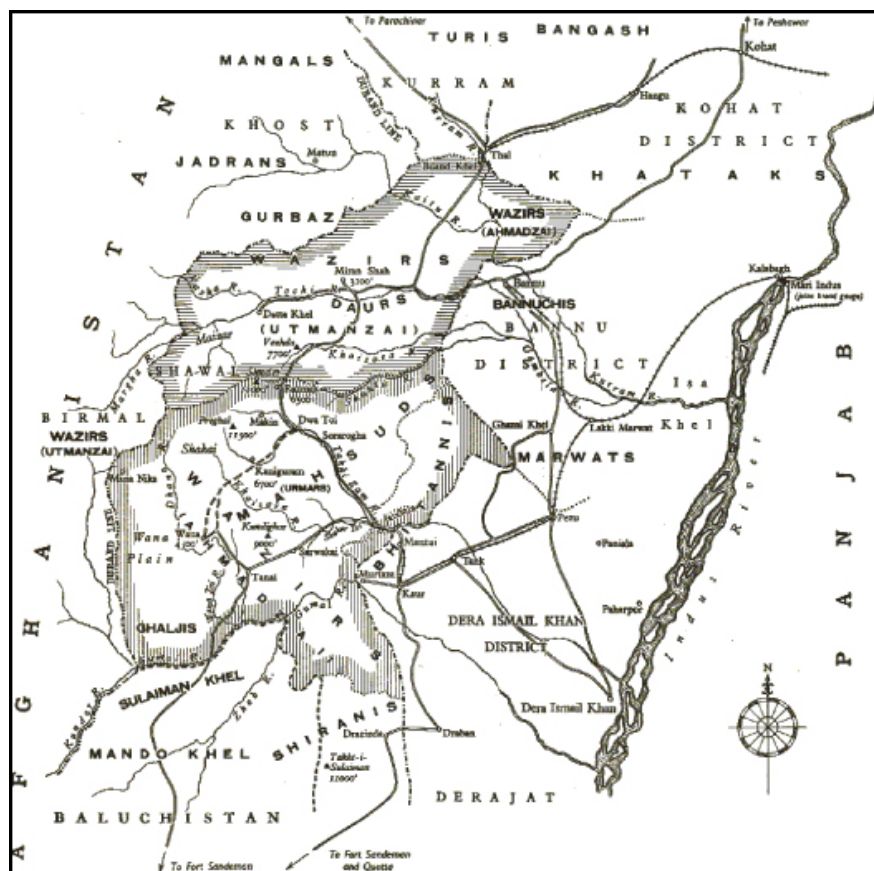


Unconventional Warfare and Counterinsurgency in Pakistan

A Brief History

Jerry Meyerle



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Introduction

Since Pakistan's creation in 1947, the country's leaders have relied on Islamic guerrillas as a "low-cost, high-return" means of achieving strategic objectives. Religious militants of varying persuasions developed an enormous infrastructure across Pakistan, as a result of state patronage and a permissive environment. The Pakistani government intended them in part to serve as a third line of defense against India and as a source of leverage and regional influence. The "jihadis," as they are often called in Pakistan, defeated the Soviet army in Afghanistan in the 1980s, helped ensure a compliant government in Afghanistan during the late 1990s, pushed Pakistan's claims to the disputed state of Kashmir, and tied down hundreds of thousands of Indian troops for almost two decades. Few militaries in history have engaged in unconventional warfare – i.e., covert support to non-state militant groups against the security forces of other countries – for so long, on such a large scale, and so close to home.

In the last ten years Pakistani leaders have reconsidered this policy and moved to shut down large parts of the "jihadi infrastructure." They have done this gradually – some might say reluctantly and only partially – as a result of intense U.S. pressure, the development and spread of a Taliban-inspired insurgency against the Pakistani state, and growing terrorist attacks in major Pakistani cities. The Pakistani military has launched numerous operations along its frontier with Afghanistan and cracked down on a number of militant groups in the country's heartland. Thousands of soldiers and paramilitaries have been killed in these operations. These efforts have considerably weakened the Taliban-inspired insurgency in Pakistan, yet it remains a potent force.

Much of Pakistan's approach to counterinsurgency involved using military operations to put pressure on various Taliban factions and the tribes that supported them, followed by overtures of peace. The Pakistani government sought to co-opt as much of the insurgency as possible – to persuade tribesmen who had joined the Taliban to cease attacks inside Pakistan, while making agreements with those who remained focused on fighting U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Those groups that refrained from violence inside Pakistan were, for

the most part, given free rein to operate across the border in Afghanistan.

This paper traces the history of the Pakistani government's support to various militant groups since 1947 and its efforts against some of these organizations, with a focus on the 2001-2012 period. The report is largely descriptive and empirical. It identifies major currents in Pakistan's strategic thinking in regard to various militant organizations over time, the evolving nature of these groups, and major operations against them in the last 10 years. It concludes with implications for the draw-down of Western forces in Afghanistan.

Figure 1. Pakistan's Western Frontier



Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, The University of Texas at Austin

The early years: 1947-1979

Within months of Pakistan's creation, the struggle for survival and the pursuit of Kashmir emerged as the two pillars of Pakistan's strategic orientation. In pursuit of these objectives, the country's leaders developed an aggressive, risk-taking military posture. They also recognized early on that they could raise irregular militias to fight under the banner of holy war, while minimizing the risk of an all-out war.¹ Islamic guerrillas promised to help Pakistan wrest control of Kashmir away from India, offset India's greater military and economic power, and project power into Afghanistan. As Pakistan fell further behind India in military terms, the irregular option became increasingly attractive.

Pakistan was founded in 1947, as a separate state for South Asia's Muslims – the idea being that they would not be safe in a Hindu-majority India. Since its beginning, the country's leaders have feared that the fledgling nation might not survive; a much larger India could attack at any time and carve the country into pieces. When British India was divided, Pakistan inherited 18 percent of the subcontinent's population, but only 10 percent of its industrial base and 6 percent of its civil servants. The new state received 30 percent of the old Indian Army's men under arms and little of its material – leaving India by far the stronger military power.² Further, Pakistan was riven by internal

¹ Much has been written on the strategic thinking behind Pakistan's support to militants and the history of this policy. For example, see Praveen Swami, *India, Pakistan, and the Secret Jihad: The Covert War in Kashmir, 1947-2004* (Routledge, 2006); Arif Jamal, *Shadow War: The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir* (Melville House, 2009); S Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, "The Jihad Paradox: Pakistan and Islamist Militancy in South Asia," *International Security* 37:1 (Summer 2012): 111-141; and Seth Jones and C. Christine Fair, *Counterinsurgency in Pakistan* (RAND Corporation, 2010).

² Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 64. See also Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 201-19; and Owen Bennet Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 262.

divisions and bereft of political institutions; its eastern and western wings were separated by over 1,000 miles of Indian territory.³

Pakistan's early leaders equated their security with countering India and matching its military power. Pakistan spent over 70 percent of its budget on defense during its early years. To keep its fractious provinces in line and put up a united front, Pakistan developed a highly centralized, semi-authoritarian government in which the military had pride of place, especially on national security matters.⁴ According to Hasan Askari Rizvi: "State survival became the primary concern of the rulers of Pakistan, who equated it with an assertive federal government, strong defense posture, high defense expenditure and an emphasis on monolithic nationalism."⁵

Second only to survival was the pursuit of Kashmir. As British India was partitioned, a passionate dispute erupted over the remote princely state, which had a Hindu ruler and a mostly Muslim population. Under the rules of partition, all Muslim majority provinces and princely states were to go to Pakistan and all non-Muslim ones to India. The Maharaja of Kashmir, however, refused to accede to Pakistan. Pakistan's founding leader, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, turned to a politician in Pakistan's northwest, who organized a small army of Pashtun tribesmen, equipped them with weapons and supplies, and sent them into Kashmir under the banner of holy war – ostensibly to liberate Kashmir's Muslims from the tyranny of the

³ East Pakistan broke away and became Bangladesh in 1971.

⁴ Khaled Ahmed, *Pakistan: The State in Crisis* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2002), 7-17. For a comprehensive treatment of how Pakistan views itself and its place in the world, see Stephen Philip Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2004). Cohen has also written one of the most definitive books on the Pakistani army. See Cohen, *The Pakistan Army* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). On the Pakistani military and its strategic culture, see also Hasan Askari Rizvi, *Military, State, and Society in Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). The most recent, and perhaps the most comprehensive, treatment of the Pakistani army since 1947 is Shuja Nawaz's *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵ Rizvi, *Military, State, and Society in Pakistan*, 1.

state's Hindu Maharaja.⁶ The Indian army responded by airlifting troops to Kashmir. Pakistani regulars then joined the fight, leading to a wider war in which India gained control over two-thirds of the province, including the Kashmir valley. In December 1948, the two sides agreed to a ceasefire line that remains to this day.⁷

In August 1965, Pakistan again attempted to seize Kashmir, by sending in irregular fighters dressed as civilians. Pakistan's military leaders at the time were concerned that India would soon modernize its forces, and that even a limited war in Kashmir would become impossible without risking total defeat.⁸ The military armed a mix of some 3,000 to 5,000 troops and local militia fighters with small arms and explosives, and quietly infiltrated them into the Kashmir valley. Their mission was to carry out acts of sabotage and foment a mass revolt in preparation for a quick Pakistani military offensive. The idea was to occupy key positions before India had time to mobilize, thereby presenting New Delhi with a *fait accompli*.

The thinking of Pakistan's military planners was that they could not win a major war with India; instead, they would rely on covert operatives to spark a rebellion followed by limited incursions in the hopes that New Delhi would not expand the war outside Kashmir.⁹ These assumptions proved incorrect. Local Kashmiris did not rise in revolt, but turned in the infiltrators. The Indian military did not accept the *fait accompli*; instead, it mounted a large-scale invasion to the south and marched on Lahore. The two countries fought a brief but intense war that ended with Pakistan's withdrawal from the Indian-controlled side of Kashmir.¹⁰

⁶ Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*, 58.

⁷ The details of the origins of the Kashmir dispute are controversial. For two opposing views on these events, see Prem Shankar Jha, *Kashmir 1947: Rival Versions of History* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Alistair Lamb, *Crisis in Kashmir, 1947-1966* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1966).

⁸ Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 31.

⁹ Nawaz, *Crossed Swords*, 207.

¹⁰ For more on the 1965 war, see Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, chapter 2.

In 1971, it was India's turn to support guerrilla fighters inside Pakistan. When a massive separatist revolt broke out in East Pakistan, India provided extensive support to the resistance, leading to the break-away of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh.¹¹ The loss of East Pakistan further convinced Pakistan's leadership that India posed an existential threat, and must therefore be countered by any means possible.

During the mid-1970s, Afghanistan provided some aid to a major separatist uprising in Pakistan's southwestern province of Baluchistan. Afghan leaders also encouraged Pakistan's Pashtun population in the northwest to secede and create a greater "Pashtunistan." Pakistan retaliated by backing Afghan Islamists who sought to overthrow the regime in Kabul – part of what was known as the "forward policy."¹² The Pakistani military put down the uprising in Baluchistan through sheer force after several years of heavy fighting, including indiscriminate airstrikes on Baluch villages.¹³

Pakistan's early weakness and vulnerability did not stop it from following a bold and uncompromising strategy towards India and Afghanistan. The thinking in the military was that the best way to defend the country was to stay on the offensive. The loss of its eastern wing only increased Pakistan's determination to resist India's growing power by whatever means it could use. The failure of the 1965 war did little to reduce Pakistan's ambitions on Kashmir or dampen the military's inclination to rely on irregular forces as a means to pursue its interests abroad.

¹¹ On the 1971 war, see Nawaz, *Crossed Swords*, chapters 11 and 12.

¹² Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 2005), 174-75. Neamatollah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Mass Mobilization, Civil War, and the Future of the Region* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 128.

¹³ Selig Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 1981), 3-4.

Fighting the Soviet Army in Afghanistan: The 1980s

In December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan – threatening to squeeze Pakistan between two hostile powers to the east and west, each capable of defeating Pakistan in a conventional war.¹⁴ The Soviet invasion also threatened the ability of the Pakistani army to retreat into Afghanistan in the event of a major war with India. Lt. Gen. Akhtar Abdul Rehman, the chief of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan’s main intelligence agency, approached the country’s military dictator, Gen. Zia ul Haq, with a plan to back the Afghan resistance. The idea was to raise the costs of the Soviet occupation, but without forcing a war with the USSR that Pakistan would most certainly lose; ISI support to the *Mujahideen*, as the Afghan resistance fighters were called, would be carefully calibrated and officially denied. Zia reportedly told Rehman in December 1979 that “the water in Afghanistan must boil at the right temperature.”¹⁵

The United States, too, saw an opportunity to bleed the Soviet army; in 1981, President Reagan signed off on \$3.2 billion in support to the Afghan *Mujahideen*, and authorized another \$4 billion in 1986. Saudi Arabia later matched U.S. funds dollar for dollar. The ISI had sole discretion over the distribution of aid to the resistance; American officials were barred from interacting with *Mujahideen* commanders, and were told little about how U.S. money and weapons were used.¹⁶ This arrangement gave considerable power to the ISI, which used its control over aid to manipulate the resistance and strengthen its favorite commanders, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and other Afghan Islamists.¹⁷ In 1987, the Islamists received about 70 percent of all

¹⁴ Frédéric Grare, *Pakistan: In the Face of the Afghan Conflict 1979-1985* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2003), 46.

¹⁵ Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf and Major Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap: Afghanistan’s Untold Story* (Lahore: Jang Publishers 1992), 20.

¹⁶ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 18; Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 59-60.

¹⁷ Nojumi, *Rise of the Taliban*, 127-28. Rashid, *Taliban*, 83.

weapons and supplies.¹⁸ The ISI's preference for Hekmatyar created tensions with the United States as the war wound down in the late 1980s. Some U.S. officials saw the fundamentalists as a potential threat, and sought to prevent their taking power in Kabul.

The Afghan war drove a massive expansion of the ISI. The agency had been founded in 1948 to coordinate intelligence from the different military services, and to handle counter-intelligence within the military. It was staffed mostly by active-duty army officers on two- to three-year rotations. As a result of largesse from the United States and Saudi Arabia, the ISI grew into a sprawling organization with officers across Pakistan and Afghanistan. By 1983, the ISI's Afghan bureau employed at least 460 officers, split into three sections (operations, logistics, and psychological warfare), each headed by a colonel. Many in the Afghan bureau were Pashtun army officers from tribes near the border, whose job was to lead teams of ISI operatives into Afghanistan.¹⁹

In 1984, at least eleven ISI teams were operating inside Afghanistan – seven against Kabul, two against Bagram, and two around Jalalabad. These teams carried out independent operations and acted as embedded advisors, fighting alongside the *Mujahideen*. When in Afghanistan, they did not communicate with headquarters but operated on their own. They were ordered to die fighting rather than risk capture.²⁰ Many of these operatives continued to work for the agency after retirement, often in an unofficial capacity.²¹

By 1986, the ISI had built an extensive insurgent infrastructure near the border with Afghanistan. Some 16,000 to 18,000 recruits passed through ISI training camps every year. ISI operatives also set up camps to facilitate guerrilla operations not directly sanctioned by higher authorities. These alternative camps trained some 6,000 to 8,000 recruits each year, many of them from Arab countries.²²

¹⁸ Yousaf, Bear Trap, 105

¹⁹ Yousaf, Bear Trap, 29.

²⁰ Ibid., 113-14.

²¹ Coll, Ghost Wars.

²² Ibid.

Between 1983 and 1987 alone, the ISI trained some 80,000 guerrillas.²³ The “Afghan Jihad” was widely seen as a just war against a brutal occupation. The pool of potential recruits in Pakistan was practically bottomless.

In the late 1980s, as the war entered its final stages, elements of the Pakistani polity that had long opposed support to the *Mujahideen* grew in power and challenged Zia’s control over the country. Many opposed Zia’s policy of Islamization in the military and the massive growth in extremist madrassahs that threatened to radicalize the country. There was concern about religious parties infiltrating college campuses. Many of the weapons intended for the *Mujahideen* were being sold in the open market, leading to rising violence across the country. There were also allegations of ISI officers smuggling weapons and drugs for personal gain.²⁴

In August 1988, Gen. Zia ul Haq was killed in a plane crash along with several senior Pakistani generals and the U.S. ambassador. After Zia’s death, ISI Chief Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul continued to oversee a massive CIA-supported effort by the ISI to recruit Islamic extremists from around the world and train them in ISI camps in Pakistan. The winding down of the Afghan war eventually gave voice to the ISI’s critics, who demanded that the agency be reined in. But this was not to be. Pakistan’s “forward policy” had defeated the Soviet army and secured Pakistan’s western border. The policy had also created new opportunities for influence in Afghanistan. As the Soviets withdrew, Pakistan moved swiftly to ensure that its allies among the *Mujahideen* would be the ones to take power in Kabul.

²³Yousaf, *Bear Trap*, 29.

²⁴Haqqani, *Pakistan*, 194-95.

Unconventional warfare in Kashmir: The 1990s

In December 1989, the same month that the Soviets began their withdrawal from Afghanistan, a massive separatist rebellion broke out in Indian-administered Kashmir.²⁵ Indian security forces responded with a large-scale crackdown that killed many civilians. Hundreds of Kashmiri youth then fled across the Line of Control into Pakistani Kashmir, where they received weapons and training from ISI operatives. The conflict snowballed into an organized separatist insurgency that gripped the entire province.

The ISI quickly capitalized on these developments, and pushed for the prosecution of an Afghanistan-style proxy war in Kashmir. The thinking among Pakistan's strategic planners was that if Islamic militants could force the USSR to withdraw from Afghanistan, they could force the Indian army to abandon Kashmir and hand the state to Pakistan. The revolt in Kashmir could not have come at a better time for the Pakistani military. The culture of holy war was at its peak with the defeat of the USSR at the hands of the *Mujahideen*. Like the resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the insurgency in Kashmir was widely viewed in Pakistan as a just cause. The infrastructure of Islamic militancy built during the Afghan war had not yet been dismantled. The training camps continued to churn out thousands of new militants, educated in radical madrassahs, every year. Between 1995 and 2000, an estimated 60,000 to 80,000 Pakistani militants trained in camps inside Afghanistan – most of them bound

²⁵ There is considerable debate about what caused this rebellion. Some in India maintain that it was the result of an ISI plot. However, most scholars agree that the rebellion emerged from political conditions internal to the state. Pakistan's influence became a significant factor only after December 1989. In fact, the uprising may have taken the Pakistani military by surprise. See Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan, and the Unending War* (London: IB Tauris, 2003); and Navnita Chadha Behera, *Demystifying Kashmir* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2007).

for the war in Kashmir.²⁶ Many trained alongside Arab recruits in camps financed by al Qaeda.²⁷

As the Soviets withdrew and civil war broke out in Afghanistan, thousands of Pakistani militants flooded back into Pakistan looking for a new cause to fight.²⁸ Rather than demobilize them, the ISI gave them additional money, weapons, and training, and sent them to fight in the “Kashmir Jihad.” Backing the Kashmir insurgency appeared to be a win-win situation on all counts: it was an opportunity to realize Pakistan’s claim over Kashmir, tie down the Indian army, and redirect thousands of potentially dangerous religious militants away from Pakistan towards India.

As in the Afghan war, the ISI used its control over weapons, money, and training to ensure that those groups which shared Islamabad’s strategic objectives came to dominate the insurgency – in this case, Islamist groups in favor of Kashmir’s accession to Pakistan.²⁹ During the early years of the insurgency, Pakistan relied on the *Hizbul Mujahideen*, a group made up of religious-minded Kashmiri youth from rural areas. The *Hizbul* also proved a more formidable military force; it stepped up the pace and scale of attacks, and transformed the revolt into something more akin to a guerilla war. Yet, by the end of 1992, the *Hizbul* had begun to lose momentum.

Pakistan responded by pushing increasing numbers of radical Pakistani militants into Kashmir; many had experience fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. ISI operatives helped organize them into a new entity known as the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* (Army of the Pure, or LeT), a disciplined organization of highly trained and motivated fighters, most

²⁶ Nojumi, *Rise of the Taliban*, 131.

²⁷ Zahid Hussein, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 44.

²⁸ Mohammad Amir Rana, *The A-Z of Jihadi Groups in Pakistan* (Lahore: Mashal Publishers, 2004), 8. Rana’s book is the most detailed treatment available on the jihadist infrastructure in Pakistan, including the religious parties.

²⁹ On Pakistan’s support to the Kashmir insurgency and its evolution during the 1990s, see Manoj Joshi, *The Lost Rebellion: Kashmir in the 90s* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1999); and Bose, *Kashmir*.

of them from Punjab province in Pakistan's heartland. The LeT carried out numerous high-profile suicide attacks known as *fidayeen* operations, in which militants stormed heavily guarded government buildings and military bases – often under the cover of a car or truck bomb – shooting indiscriminately and lobbing grenades. The group carried out massacres of Hindu villagers in the remote mountains south of the Kashmir valley. It was also behind numerous bombings against civilians in major Indian cities.

While the insurgency raged in Kashmir during the 1990s, Pakistan struggled to gain control over Afghanistan and secure a pliant government in Kabul that would end the civil war, reopen trade routes to Central Asia, and promise to allow Pakistani military forces to withdraw into Afghanistan in the event of a war with India. Pakistan focused its efforts on pursuing a military solution through support to trusted clients among the Afghan *Mujahideen*. When Islamabad's traditional ally, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, proved unable to hold Kabul, Pakistan shifted its support to Mullah Omar's Taliban. The Taliban surged into southern Afghanistan in 1994; it captured the western city of Herat in 1995; and took Kabul and the eastern provinces in 1996. By the end of 1996, the Taliban controlled more than 75 percent of the country.³⁰ Pakistan's fortunes were running high; never had it exerted so much influence in Afghanistan or come so close to realizing its ambitions in Kashmir.

In early 1999, the Pakistani army launched a bold and risky operation to seize several strategic peaks on the Indian side of Kashmir. The operation, conceived and led by Chief of Army Staff Gen. Pervez Musharraf, involved Pakistani soldiers fighting alongside militants from the *Lashkar-e-Toiba*. The idea was to occupy positions abandoned by the Indian army during the winter, presenting India with a *fait accompli* when the snows melted in the spring. The plan was similar to that of the 1965 war, except that in 1999 both India and Pakistan had nuclear weapons. Pakistan's military planners assumed that India would not risk nuclear escalation to re-take lost ground and that the United States would intervene on Pakistan's behalf. Both assumptions proved incorrect. India assaulted the seized positions with ground troops and airpower, while the United States called on Pakistan to

³⁰ Nojumi, *Rise of the Taliban*, chapters 12, 13, and 15.

withdraw. Pakistan's prime minister ordered the army to abandon the positions, which it did with reluctance.

Two months later, Musharraf overthrew the civilian government and declared martial law. He then stepped up support to the Kashmir insurgency.³¹ In 2000, the Indian government negotiated a series of ceasefires with what remained of Kashmir's home-grown insurgents, who expressed a desire to end hostilities with New Delhi. In response, the ISI pushed a fresh wave of Pakistani militants into Kashmir, where they carried out attacks of unprecedented magnitude, many of them on civilians. These militants also assassinated several Kashmiri separatist leaders involved in the ceasefire. The negotiations ultimately failed when it became clear that the ethnic Kashmiri militant groups could not deliver peace to the valley.

It is difficult to say how much control the ISI had over the "jihadi" organizations active in Kashmir during the 1990s. There is little doubt, however, that the agency supported them actively. As long as they carried out attacks in India (rather than inside Pakistan), the militants served to tie down India's armed forces and undermine its military power. In the minds of Islamabad's military planners, that made Pakistan safer. Pakistan's military leadership did not appear to be concerned about the potential blowback of this policy; nor was there considerable introspection about the army's failed incursion across the Line of Control in the summer of 1999. The events of 1999 were a setback, yet the rash of attacks in Kashmir in 2000 and India's failed ceasefire suggested that the militants could still bleed the Indian army enough to make supporting them worthwhile.

Throughout the 1990s, Pakistan fought two large-scale unconventional wars simultaneously. The military's covert campaigns in Afghanistan and Kashmir led to the explosive growth of a "jihadi culture" across Pakistan. Islamic militant groups operated openly throughout the country with the support of the government. The country's military in the 1990s came closer than it had ever been to achieving its regional ambitions. By the end of the decade, however, Pakistan faced growing internal violence, political instability, and international isolation. The government's claims to Kashmir had

³¹ Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan*, 9.

been reinvigorated, yet the insurgency ultimately failed to deliver the disputed state to Pakistan.

Pakistan's turn-around: 2001-2002

After the September 11th attacks, Pakistan's policy of covert warfare threatened to plunge the country into a major confrontation with Washington. The United States presented Pakistan with an ultimatum: cooperate against the Taliban and al Qaeda or be branded a terrorist state and isolated internationally. Pakistan's president and army chief, Pervez Musharraf, consulted with other senior military leaders. Several opposed complying with US demands, but the majority reportedly supported Musharraf's decision to cooperate.³²

For the first time since the Afghan War of the 1980s, Pakistan was once again thrust into close cooperation with Washington. But circumstances had changed since the 1980s. The United States and Pakistan no longer shared the same strategic interests, as they had during the Afghan war. Washington sought the destruction of al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the vast infrastructure of Islamic militancy built during the 1980s and 90s. Pakistan still looked on the militants, which it had nurtured for over 20 years, as a vehicle for its strategic interests, particularly against India in Kashmir, as well as a counter to secular-minded insurgents in Pakistani Baluchistan fighting for a separate state.

The Pakistani military was also worried about the consequences of taking on the entire jihadist movement all at one time, and was concerned that major operations against the militants could cause fissures in the army and the intelligence services, with which the Taliban and Pakistani jihadist groups had been allies for decades. The militants had strong connections to the army and intelligence agencies, and were a growing force in the country's politics – especially among the religious right, the army's traditional ally. These connections were particularly deep in the ISI, which had become a

³² Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 219-20. Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan*, 41.

powerful institution with its own agenda and widespread influence in the army's officer corps.³³ The same was true of many younger officers in the regular army – some but not all of whom had served in the ISI.³⁴ Many had fought alongside the Taliban for years against the Northern Alliance.

Musharraf talked repeatedly of doing a “U-turn” and “strategic reorientation” on the militants. Pakistani security forces provided over-flight rights to U.S. aircraft, deployed forces to the border, and arrested al Qaeda operatives. It did not, however, act against groups fighting India in Kashmir.³⁵ Not only were these groups considered an important strategic asset and little threat to the United States, but they were also extremely dangerous. The Kashmir-focused groups operated across Pakistan and could do untold damage if they decided to declare war on the state. The ISI also retained its ties with the Taliban, calculating that Washington's commitment to Afghanistan would be short lived.³⁶

As the Taliban crumbled in Afghanistan, India-focused extremists with close ties to the military – the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* and *Jaish-e-Mohammad* – stepped up their attacks in Kashmir.³⁷ In December 2001, Pakistani militants armed with military-grade explosives attacked the Indian Parliament. They were shot down moments before entering the building where the country's entire Parliament was in session, along with several cabinet ministers. Had the attack succeeded, it would have wiped out most of India's political leadership. India mobilized over 500,000 troops and threatened to cross the Line of Control to destroy the training camps in Pakistani Kashmir. Pakistan mobilized in turn, taking troops away from its western border, where

³³ Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan*, 46.

³⁴ Farooq, “Islam in the Garrison.” *Herald (Pakistan)*, August 16, 2011.

³⁵ Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism*, 223-27.

³⁶ Nawaz, *Crossed Swords*, 568.

³⁷ Haqqani, *Pakistan*, 261-62, 302-05.

they had been involved in blocking the flight of the Taliban and al Qaeda out of Afghanistan.³⁸

In early 2002, Pakistan faced intense pressure on both its western and eastern fronts, with the United States and India threatening dire consequences for continued support to extremists. Musharraf then made a seminal speech in which he vowed to curb extremism and terrorism in Pakistan. He banned several extremist groups involved in attacks in Kashmir and had some of their leaders arrested. The government later released many of them, however. Though forced to keep a lower profile, most continued to operate as before.³⁹ The military did not shut them down, but asked them to lay low for a while and fight a “more controlled jihad.” During the next few years, infiltration across the Line of Control separating Indian and Pakistani Kashmir slowed but did not stop.⁴⁰

Thousands of Taliban and al Qaeda fighters flooded into Pakistan’s tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan, fleeing U.S. operations.⁴¹ A number of Arab, Chechen, and Uzbek fighters apparently loyal to al Qaeda were captured or killed in 2002 during limited operations by Pakistani security forces arrayed at points along the border, yet many made their way into Pakistan unharmed. Most took refuge in North and South Waziristan; others, further north in Mohmand and Bajaur agencies (also part of the tribal areas). Little effort was made to stop Afghan and Pakistani fighters from crossing the border. When it came to Pakistan, U.S. officials were focused almost entirely on al Qaeda and made little effort to pressure Islamabad to stop the flow of Taliban fighters into its border areas.

Unable to operate in Afghanistan and faced with a government in Pakistan that appeared to have sided with the United States, Taliban and al Qaeda commanders reorganized inside Pakistan and forged

³⁸ For details on India’s mobilization and the crisis from New Delhi’s perspective, see V Sood, *Operation Parakram: The War Unfinished* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003).

³⁹ Abbas, *Pakistan’s Drift into Extremism*, 224.

⁴⁰ Haqqani, *Pakistan*, 108-12, 306; Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan*, 53.

⁴¹ Mehsud, “The Battle for Pakistan.”

alliances with tribes along the frontier. Many Pakistani tribesmen became radicalized and joined the resistance – especially in North Waziristan, South Waziristan, and Bajaur.⁴² In Bajaur, thousands of tribesmen joined with a local cleric known as Sufi Mohammad and crossed into Afghanistan's Kunar province to fight U.S. forces. Many were killed; others later returned to take up arms against Pakistan. Pakistan did little to stop these incursions. The country's interior minister declared that "they [the militants] should go to Afghanistan rather than disrupting civil life here."⁴³

The rise of the Taliban in Pakistan: 2003-2006

The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan caused bewilderment and confusion in the ranks of the Taliban and other militant groups, but the movement as a whole survived.⁴⁴ Subscriptions to extremist organizations surged, and many fresh recruits lined up to fight a new war in Afghanistan, this time against the United States.⁴⁵ The Taliban regrouped and deepened its relationships with various Pakistani militant groups, including Kashmir-focused organizations such as the *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, Sunni sectarian groups such as the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, and disgruntled splinter groups keen to fight the government in Islamabad.⁴⁶

Over time, differences emerged between militants interested only in fighting U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan and those who wanted to take the war to Pakistan.⁴⁷ Across the spectrum of militant groups, there was considerable resentment against the Pakistani government for aiding the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, targeting al Qaeda, and clamping down on infiltration into Indian Kashmir. The deployment

⁴² Claudio Franco, "The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan." In Antonio Giustozzi, ed. *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. 269-91; Mehsud, "Battle for Pakistan."

⁴³ Hussein, *Frontline Pakistan*, 47.

⁴⁴ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 96. Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism*, 234-35.

⁴⁵ Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism*, 223.

⁴⁶ Franco, "Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan," 274.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 274.

of Pakistani troops along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in support of U.S. operations against al Qaeda further inflamed sentiments along the frontier.

Various Pakistani militant groups with a grudge against their government coalesced into a coherent movement. The emerging Pakistani Taliban – much of it rooted in local politics, recruited from particular tribes, and subscribing to different ideologies and religious sects – became increasingly inter-connected. Punjabi Pakistani militants with sophisticated asymmetric warfare training and experience fighting Indian forces in Kashmir traveled to the frontier and joined various Taliban factions. Members of sectarian terrorist groups focused on targeting Pakistan's Shi'ite minority also traveled to the frontier, where they found allies in al Qaeda (itself a virulently sectarian organization), and a number of Pakistani Taliban factions. These Punjabi Pakistani militants would prove to be some of the most dangerous opponents of the government after 2006.

From 2003 to 2006, the Afghan Taliban rebuilt its organization inside Pakistan. The frontier was relatively quiet during this critical period. The government, worried about a potential backlash and apparently not aware of the extent of the growing threat, failed to act. There was little pressure from the United States to flush out the remnants of the Afghan Taliban or its Pakistani off-shoots; the focus of U.S. policy on Pakistan during these years was to eliminate al Qaeda.⁴⁸ Few U.S. officials – in Washington, Afghanistan, or Pakistan – appeared to understand the extent to which the Taliban had been able to regroup and find supporters inside Pakistan.

North and South Waziristan

The first major Taliban commander to emerge among the Pakistani tribesmen was Nek Mohammad from the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe in South Waziristan agency. Soon after the fall of the Taliban, Nek Mohammad organized several hundred fighters from among his tribe to fight Western forces in Afghanistan. He also welcomed into his

⁴⁸ Fair and Jones, "Pakistan's Wars Within". *Survival*, 51:6, December 2009 – January 2010: 161-188; Abbas, "A Profile of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan." *CTC Sentinel*, January 2008.

ranks a number of Uzbek and Arab fighters associated with al Qaeda. This brought him into confrontation with the Pakistani military, which was under pressure from the United States to flush al Qaeda out of the tribal areas. In 2002 and 2003, the military launched limited raids against al Qaeda in North and South Waziristan. It killed and captured a number of operatives; however, many remained at large, under the protection of local tribesmen.⁴⁹

In South Waziristan, the government put pressure on the Ahmadzai Wazir to hand over al Qaeda militants. Laws governing the tribal areas, dating back to the colonial period, allowed the government to apply collective punishment against tribes accused of harboring fugitives from justice or enemies of the state. These laws, known as the Frontier Crimes Regulation, stipulated that an entire tribe could be held responsible for the actions of any of its members. In late 2003, Pakistani security forces arrested wealthy and influential members of the Ahmadzai Wazir, impounded their vehicles, and sealed their businesses – including gas stations, hotels, restaurants, and shops.⁵⁰ In response to this pressure, sections of the tribe formed a 1,500-man militia – known as a *lashkar*. The militia demolished the houses of some tribesmen accused of harboring al Qaeda, but was largely ineffective. Nek Mohammad remained defiant.

In March and April 2004, about 7,000 soldiers from the Pakistani army and paramilitary Frontier Corps were dispatched to South Waziristan. They took heavy casualties and faced numerous desertions. The military called off the operation and signed a hasty peace deal with Nek Mohammad.⁵¹ The government agreed to compensate the tribesmen for damages caused in the operation and to withdraw its forces, on the condition that “foreign” militants – i.e., those not from Afghanistan or Pakistan – register with the government.⁵² The military offered amnesty to those who agreed to

⁴⁹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 271-72.

⁵⁰ “Tribesmen May Seek More Time,” *Dawn* (Pakistan), October 11, 2003.

⁵¹ Lalwani, “Pakistani Capabilities for a Counterinsurgency Campaign”. New America Foundation, 2009; Khan Mahsud, “The Battle for Pakistan: Militancy and Conflict in South Waziristan.” New America Foundation, April 2010.

⁵² Khan Mahsud, “Battle for Pakistan.”

surrender. None did and the agreement soon collapsed. The deal was seen as a defeat for the army and gave strength to the insurgency. Tribesmen from across the area reportedly flocked to Nek Mohammad's banner.⁵³

In June 2004, the military resumed operations in South Waziristan – this time relying on airstrikes rather than ground maneuvers. The airstrikes targeted the houses of particular clans believed to be sheltering al Qaeda. That same month, Nek Mohammad was killed in a U.S. drone strike. He was soon replaced by his elder brother, Haji Mohammad Omar, a commander of somewhat lesser stature.⁵⁴ In November, four months after Nek Mohammad's death, leaders from four powerful sub-tribes of the Ahmadzai Wazir agreed to cooperate with the government and put pressure on other sub-tribes to follow suit.⁵⁵ Several pro-government elders were killed, but the rest remained resolute. The army reciprocated by releasing 250 local men suspected of involvement in militant activities and relaxed its pressure on the tribe.⁵⁶

The government also made agreements with militants from the Uthmanzai Wazir, the dominant tribe of North Waziristan. Their leader was Hafiz Gul Bahadur, a powerful commander known to be close to Sirajuddin Haqqani, head of the Haqqani Network, a powerful Afghan militant group operating out of North Waziristan. Bahadur provided sanctuary to Haqqani's followers – most of whom were natives of Khost province in eastern Afghanistan, which borders North Waziristan – and looked after their interests in negotiations with the Pakistani military. In 2004 and 2005, the army launched a number of limited raids against al Qaeda hideouts in North

⁵³ Franco, "Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan"; Joshua White, "Pakistan's Islamist Frontier: Islamic Politics and U.S. Policy in Pakistan's North-West Frontier". Center for Faith and International Affairs, 2008; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 271-72.

⁵⁴ Haji Mohammad Omar was from the same clan as Nek Mohammad – the Yargul Khel of the Ahmadzai Wazir.

⁵⁵ Iqbal Khattak, "Shakai tribes will support government against foreigners," *Daily Times* (Pakistan), July 6, 2004.

⁵⁶ Naveed Miraj, "250 Tribesmen to be Freed in Wana, Shakai," *The News* (Pakistan), November 11, 2004.

Waziristan, but avoided confrontations with the followers of Bahadur and Haqqani.

The military had a more difficult time with the Mehsud tribe, which dominates several valleys in the northern and central parts of South Waziristan. The Mehsud were historical rivals of the Wazir, and were known to be even more fiercely independent and difficult to control. Al Qaeda had also taken refuge in the Mehsud areas and had become closely integrated with militants there. In December 2004, Mehsud militants from South Waziristan claimed responsibility for a bomb blast on the civil secretariat in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan province – the first bombing by tribal militants outside the tribal areas, and a harbinger of things to come.⁵⁷

Sections of the Mehsud tribe convened a *jirga* (gathering of tribal leaders) to encourage reconciliation between the government and radicalized tribesmen. Militants fired rockets at the *jirga*, killing 17 elders.⁵⁸ This was the beginning of many attacks on pro-government Mehsud leaders, leading to their eventual loss of control over the tribe. Unlike their neighbors among the Ahmadzai Wazir, the pro-government leaders of the Mehsud were not strong enough to prevail. The tribe turned inexorably against the government. A radical commander named Baitullah Mehsud emerged as the dominant force among the tribe.

In January 2005, the military moved cautiously into the Mehsud areas of South Waziristan and set up checkpoints along major roads. In February, the military negotiated an agreement with Baitullah Mehsud, whereby he and his men were promised amnesty in exchange for a promise to hand over al Qaeda members and refrain from attacks on government forces. The military also reportedly paid a large sum of money to Mehsud, ostensibly to help him repay debts owed to al Qaeda.⁵⁹ As with the army's agreement with the Ahmadzai

⁵⁷ "Wanted Tribal Militant Claims Responsibility for Pakistan Blast," Asia Africa Intelligence Wire, December 20, 2004.

⁵⁸ "17 Die in Attack on Mehsud Jirga," Daily Times (Pakistan), October 27, 2004.

⁵⁹ Ismail Khan, "Militants Were Paid to Repay al Qaeda Debt," Dawn, February 9, 2005.

Wazir, the unwritten understanding was that Baitullah Mehsud's followers were free to target U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Mehsud signed the agreement at Sararogha in South Waziristan in the presence of tribal leaders and militants shouting "death to America."⁶⁰

Commanders in North and South Waziristan did not honor their pledges to hand over foreign militants. As a result, raids against al Qaeda suspects continued. Militants from all three major tribes accused the government of going back on its promises to cease operations in the tribal areas and withdraw its forces. In July 2005, Baitullah Mehsud publicly abrogated his peace accord with the military and vowed to renew attacks on government forces. The Uthmanzai and Ahmadzai Wazir commanders threatened to break their deals with the government as well if the raids continued.⁶¹ In 2006, the military pushed to fortify its peace accords with the Ahmadzai Wazir and Uthmanzai Wazir, while renewing operations against the followers of Baitullah Mehsud. The aim appeared to be divide and rule – to isolate the Mehsuds and prevent the militants of North and South Waziristan from uniting against the government.

In September, the military signed a new agreement with Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan that would prove enduring in the years to come.⁶² Bahadur pledged not to attack Pakistani government forces or shelter al Qaeda members. The Pakistani military then withdrew from many checkpoints in North Waziristan and extended amnesty to Bahadur's key lieutenants.⁶³ The government insisted that the accord was with the Uthmanzai Wazir tribe, not the Taliban – yet, it was clear that the main signatory was Bahadur, an ally of Haqqani and avowed supporter of the Taliban. According to some reports,

⁶⁰ Iqbal Khattak, "Baitullah Mehsud and 35 Others Get Government Amnesty," Daily Times, February 8, 2005.

⁶¹ Ismail Khan, "Militant Leader Threatens to Attack Forces," Dawn, July 30, 2005.

⁶² Sadia Sulaiman and Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari, "Hafiz Gul Bahadur: A Profile of the Leader of the North Waziristan Taliban," Terrorism Monitor, April 10, 2009.

⁶³ "Arms Swapped in Waziristan," Dawn, September 7, 2006.

Bahadur entered into the agreement upon the urging of Mullah Omar, who insisted that he and other Pakistani commanders break with al Qaeda, refrain from attacks inside Pakistan, and keep all energies focused on Afghanistan.⁶⁴

Near the end of 2006, a new commander, Mullah Nazir, emerged among the Ahmadzai Wazir militants in South Waziristan. Nazir was close to the radical Afghan Taliban group, the Hizbul-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG), and was committed to fighting the United States and NATO in Afghanistan.⁶⁵ He moved closer to Bahadur and reaffirmed his tribe's agreement with the government. With the help of the army, Nazir and his followers killed hundreds of Uzbek fighters and forced most of the rest to flee from areas under his control – a long-standing demand of the military. Many found refuge in Mehsud-dominated areas, and contributed to the further radicalization of that tribe. Most of these fighters were members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which was believed to be close to al Qaeda. Nazir warned other Ahmadzai Wazir leaders against harboring the Uzbeks.⁶⁶ A number of Arab al Qaeda fighters continued to find refuge in areas under Nazir's control. They later became the target of U.S. drone strikes.

Bajaur and Mohmand

During the 2003-2006 period, the military held off on launching operations in Mohmand and Bajaur agencies, farther north, where a number of al Qaeda fighters had also taken refuge. Thousands of tribesmen in the northern agencies had fought U.S. forces in Afghanistan and become increasingly disgruntled with their government and its support for the United States and its operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban. It was in Bajaur that Pakistani militants first began to organize against the Pakistani state in a deliberate fashion, to infiltrate into the settled areas of the country, and to threaten suicide at-

⁶⁴ Sulaiman and Bukhari, "Hafiz Gul Bahadur."

⁶⁵ "Wana Militants Vow to Fight in Afghanistan," Daily Times, March 27, 2007.

⁶⁶ "Azam Warsak Cleared of Uzbeks," Dawn, April 10, 2007.

tacks in major cities. The spark that ignited them came from a series of U.S. drone strikes.

In October 2006, a drone strike on a madrassah in Damadola village of Bajaur killed an estimated 80 people – most of them students, some or all of whom were likely training to fight in Afghanistan. The target of the strike was a number of al Qaeda commanders who may have also perished in the attack.⁶⁷ Damadola was the stronghold of Faqir Mohammad, the commander of the *Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi* (TNSM), a militant group dating back to the 1990s dedicated to the establishment of Shariah law through force. The group had waned in the late 1990s but enjoyed a resurgence following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.

The day after the strike, Faqir Mohammad addressed a large rally in Khar, the capital of Bajaur agency, and vowed to raise an army of suicide bombers to fight the United States and its ally, the Pakistani military. Nine days later, a suicide bomber killed 42 Pakistani army recruits at an army base in the country's northwest. As in North and South Waziristan, the military launched limited raids, which were followed by a peace accord with the militants. Faqir Mohammad agreed to cease his attacks and evict al Qaeda from Bajaur. The suicide bombings abated, only to resume in greater strength a year later. Al Qaeda continued to operate in Bajaur as before.

By 2006 – the year that the Afghan Taliban launched a massive offensive across southern Afghanistan – it had become clear that some Pakistani insurgent factions had turned against their government. This was due to a combination of factors – among them, widespread opposition to U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan's official support to the U.S. effort, and the flight of Taliban and al Qaeda fighters into Pakistan. The deployment of troops into the tribal agencies – the first such deployment since the creation of Pakistan in 1947 – was the trigger that finally turned thousands of Pakistani tribesmen and battle-hardened militants firmly against the state.

⁶⁷ M Ilyas Khan, "The Afghan-Pakistan Militant Nexus," BBC News, October 2011.

By the end of 2006, the Taliban ruled nearly all of North and South Waziristan, as well as much of Bajaur and Mohmand agencies farther north. At least 150 pro-government tribal leaders were killed between 2004 and 2006 as the Pakistani Taliban consolidated their control. The militants used their power to recruit and train ever-larger forces. This included an extensive and growing infrastructure for the recruitment, indoctrination, training, and deployment of suicide bombers. As early as 2005, the Haqqani Network began sending small numbers to Afghanistan – most of them trained in camps in North Waziristan in areas controlled by Hafiz Gul Bahadur. By 2006, this infrastructure extended to Karachi, Pakistan's commercial capital, where young men were recruited and indoctrinated before being sent to the frontier.

Rather than clear the tribal areas of militants and put an end to the nascent Pakistani Taliban, the army sought to put pressure on the frontier tribes through punitive military expeditions, followed by overtures of peace. Despite the growing power of the Taliban, the military leadership appeared convinced that most of the insurgents and the tribes to which they belonged could be persuaded to cooperate with the government. Those factions that agreed to hand over key al Qaeda suspects and refrain from attacks inside Pakistan were largely left alone to carry out attacks inside Afghanistan. There is little doubt that this policy, at least in part, allowed the Taliban to regroup and launch a massive offensive in southern Afghanistan in 2006. The Taliban in South Waziristan openly called on young men to go to Afghanistan and fight. The military made little attempt to stop them from crossing the border.

The military in effect encouraged the Pakistani Taliban to join hands with the Afghan Taliban in its war against the United States and NATO. Opposition to the United States was the one thing that united the different militant factions operating inside Pakistan. The government then focused its efforts on those groups believed to pose a particular threat to Pakistan. In the short term, this divide-and-rule approach pushed much of the problem into Afghanistan and took pressure off the military. In the long term it gave strength to the Pakistani Taliban, which would prove far more dangerous and difficult to control than originally anticipated.

All-out war in Pakistan: 2007-2009

In January 2007, a confrontation emerged between the army and a motley crew of militants operating out of the Red Mosque in Islamabad. The government had been willing to turn a blind eye to overt Taliban activities along the frontier, but not in the nation's capital. The insurgents were from various groups in the Punjab and the tribal areas. Their leader was a firebrand cleric known as Abdul Rashid Ghazi. In July, the army laid siege to the mosque in a bloody operation in which many insurgents were killed. The Red Mosque crisis and its aftermath indicated just how far the Taliban phenomenon had spread inside Pakistan.

The siege helped galvanize a highly fragmented insurgency involving numerous militant factions, which prior to 2007 had operated separately with their own pools of recruits, areas of operation, and local agendas. For the next three years, suicide and other terrorist attacks rose to unprecedented levels, and the insurgency expanded across the tribal agencies and into the country's heartland – forcing the military to take serious action for the first time since 2001.⁶⁸

Emergence of the Pakistani Taliban as a major threat

A wave of violence followed. In 2007, fighters loyal to Baitullah Mehsud captured as many as 280 Pakistani soldiers, including a colonel and nine other army officers, in a series of large-scale ambushes in South Waziristan. The militants threatened to execute the hostages if the army did not withdraw from the agency and cease its “humiliation” of the Mehsud.⁶⁹ It appeared as if much of the tribe had mobilized against the government. Tensions also grew with militants in North Waziristan, threatening to put an end to the government's peace accord with Hafiz Gul Bahadur. The militants

⁶⁸ Khan. “Untangling the Punjabi Taliban Network”. CTC Sentinel, March 2010; Franco, “Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan.”

⁶⁹ Iqbal Khattak, “Baitullah Executes Three Soldiers,” Daily Times, October 5, 2007. In early November, 200 of the soldiers were released in exchange for 25 militants held by the military. The rest were released soon after. “200 Soldiers Released in South Waziristan,” Daily Times, November 5, 2007.

attacked army checkpoints and shot down several helicopters, and the military responded with airstrikes.⁷⁰

In Bajaur, thousands of gun-wielding tribesmen gathered in Khar, the capital of Bajaur, and declared their support for Abdul Rashid Ghazi.⁷¹ A shaky truce with the government signed in March had broken down by May, as militants attacked outposts across the agency through a combination of ambushes, massed assaults, and suicide bombings. The military shelled suspected insurgent positions and conducted a number of raids before convening a tribal *jirga* and entering into another round of failed talks. By the end of 2007, all but a few government positions in Bajaur had been over-run and much of the population had fled from militant strongholds near the border.⁷² Followers of Faqir Mohammad assassinated elders accused of working with the government, including moderate Islamist politicians, and offered sanctuary to al Qaeda and other hardline militants fleeing army operations elsewhere along the frontier.⁷³

In Mohmand agency, which had remained relatively peaceful until 2007, some 200 local militants seized the shrine of Haji Sahib Turangzai, a revered figure who had led revolts against the British Indian army along the frontier during colonial times. They dubbed it the Red Mosque – after the mosque of the same name in Islamabad – and pledged solidarity with the followers of Abdul Rashid Ghazi. The insurgents were led by Umar Khalid, a previously unknown commander with experience fighting in Kashmir during the 1990s and in Afghanistan after 2001. He shot to prominence as a result of the crisis following the siege of the Red Mosque in Islamabad. Ambushes on convoys and massed assaults on border posts and other checkpoints became the norm. Some of these were suicide attacks.

⁷⁰ “50 Killed as Jets Pound Village,” Dawn, October 10, 2007; “Eighteen Tribal Militants Killed in Fierce Clashes in Pakistan,” Dawn, July 31, 2007.

⁷¹ Masood Safi, “Massive Bajaur Rally Backs Ghazi,” The News, July 10, 2007.

⁷² Mushtaq Yusufzai, “Residents Shift to Safer Places Amid Fears of Clashes in Bajaur,” The News, December 14, 2007.

⁷³ “Militants Destroy Five Levies Pickets in Bajaur,” Daily Times, October 26, 2007; Mushtaq Yusufzai, “Masked Men Kill Four in Bajaur,” The News, October 21, 2007.

The Taliban assassinated traditional leaders and bombed pro-government tribal *jirgas*.⁷⁴

In the fall of 2007, militants loyal to Maulana Fazullah, a Taliban commander in the Swat valley, a settled area roughly 250 kilometers northwest of the capital, over-ran police stations and raised the Taliban flag over government offices.⁷⁵ The government tried to negotiate with the insurgents, even releasing a top commander as a goodwill gesture, but failed.⁷⁶ The police and the military took heavy casualties in fighting across the valley, most of which fell under the Taliban's sway. For the first time, the militants were in control of population centers outside the tribal areas. Prior to 2007, the thinking in the military had been that the insurgency could be contained to the tribal areas. The fall of Swat led to speculation about whether the regime itself might be at risk.⁷⁷

Militants carried out suicide attacks against security forces across the frontier and in Pakistan's heartland. Bombings on military outposts and convoys inflicted heavy casualties. There was also a wave of suicide bombings in major cities – especially Lahore, Peshawar, and Karachi – many of them against civilian targets. Perhaps most worrying of all for the military were suicide attacks on high-security targets in the capital. In 2007, the Supreme Court in Islamabad was targeted twice. In September, and again in November, there was a double suicide bombing on the army headquarters in Rawalpindi, near Islamabad. One of these attacks was on a bus carrying ISI employees, some of whom were killed. Several additional bombings targeted soldiers and police at checkpoints in the capital. In December, Pakistan's minister of interior, Aftab Ahmed Sherpao, was targeted and barely survived. The attacks in Islamabad and

⁷⁴ Imtiaz Ali, "Taliban Find Fertile New Ground in Pakistan," Asia Times, January 30, 2008.

⁷⁵ Lalwani, 2009.

⁷⁶ "Jailed TNSM chief admitted to Peshawar hospital," Daily Times, November 17, 2007.

⁷⁷ "Pakistan's Taliban at the Gates," Time, November 20, 2007.

Rawalpindi represented a major escalation and a serious threat to the country's centers of power.⁷⁸

In December 2007, some 40 separate factions of Pakistani militants came together to form the *Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan* (The Movement for the Taliban in Pakistan, or TTP). Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan became its chief. Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan was named the deputy commander; Faqir Mohammad in Bajaur, the general secretary. This was an unprecedented show of unity among the notoriously fractious Pakistani militants. Only Maulvi Nazir, who at that time was engaged in a struggle to evict the Uzbek militants from his area of South Waziristan, was absent.

The TTP served as an umbrella for a wide array of jihadi groups – including sectarian organizations focused on targeting Shias and groups that had before been focused on fighting India in Kashmir. What they all had in common was a desire to fight the Pakistani state, as well as Western forces in Afghanistan. The group's objective, according to its spokesman, was to “unite the Taliban against NATO forces in Afghanistan and to wage a defensive jihad against Pakistani forces here.”⁷⁹ The power of the TTP came from its ability to capture a widespread current of discontent with the Pakistani government – among restive tribesmen, as well as militant groups formed to fight a variety of causes – and bring together the discontented parties towards a common goal. The TTP's ambitions extended beyond simply pushing the military out of the tribal areas and carving out a *de facto* independent state. The movement overcame local and tribal divisions and bridged the gap between Pashtun insurgents along the frontier and Punjabi militants in the country's heartland.

New gangs emerged in different areas, then connected to the TTP and pledged allegiance to Baitullah Mehsud. Sectarian and Kashmir-focused organizations such as the *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, organized by the ISI in the late 1990s to foment terrorism in India, and the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, which specialized in attacks on Pakistan's Shi'ite minority, set up camps in areas controlled by the TTP and helped facilitate its

⁷⁸ Laura Roberts, “Pakistan: Timeline of Suicide Bomb Attacks, 2007-2011,” The Telegraph, May 13, 2011.

⁷⁹ “Centralized Taliban Organization Set Up,” Dawn, December 15, 2007.

operations.⁸⁰ These groups were based mainly in the Punjab in the country's heartland and had extensive networks there. They were relatively well educated; many had extensive experience fighting the Indian army in Kashmir and had received sophisticated training in ISI camps. Analysts have dubbed them the "Punjabi Taliban Network."⁸¹ Because of the growing connections between militant groups along the frontier and in central Pakistan, operations in the tribal areas resulted in retaliatory attacks in major cities.⁸²

Religious seminaries run by sectarian militias served as recruitment and indoctrination centers for suicide bombers used by the TTP for attacks in Pakistan and by Mullah Dadullah's faction of the Afghan Taliban in southern Afghanistan.⁸³ According to Pakistani officials, approximately 70 percent of the suicide bombers deployed in Pakistan and Afghanistan came from a network of madrassahs and training camps run by Qari Hussein, a TTP commander affiliated with the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*. According to some analysts, many suicide attacks attributed to Baitullah Mehsud and the TTP were actually carried out by the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*.⁸⁴ Much of al Qaeda joined the TTP as well, in response to Pakistan's efforts to capture and kill its members. Al Qaeda cadres worked mostly in the background, coordinating suicide bombings and other operations.⁸⁵

The military response

The military reacted to the emergence of the TTP by launching renewed operations in Swat, South Waziristan, Bajaur, and

⁸⁰ White, "Pakistan's Islamist Frontier," 92; "Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge." International Crisis Group, Asia Report Number 164, March 13, 2009.

⁸¹ Abbas, "Defining the Punjabi Taliban Network." CTC Sentinel, April 2009.

⁸² Khan, "Untangling the Punjabi Taliban Network." CTC Sentinel, March 2010.

⁸³ ICG, "Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge." Mullah Dadullah was an Afghan Taliban commander in Kandahar known for bringing suicide bombing to Afghanistan. He was killed in May 2007.

⁸⁴ Jamal, "A Profile of Pakistan's Lashkar-i-Jhangvi."

⁸⁵ Don Rassler, "Al Qaeda's Pakistan Strategy." CTC Sentinel, June 2009.

Mohmand. Government offensives beginning near the end of 2007 and continuing throughout 2008 resulted in intense fighting and heavy casualties on both sides – an indication of how powerful the Pakistani Taliban had become. The movement continued to grow despite the army’s deployment of additional forces, and suicide attacks across Pakistan escalated. The army’s failure to stem the TTP’s expansion in 2008 demonstrated that past approaches – focused on piecemeal operations and hasty peace deals – would not be sufficient. The army deployed additional forces in 2009 and launched simultaneous ground operations in Swat, South Waziristan, Bajaur, and Mohmand. The military also moved into Orakzai agency in pursuit of TTP militants fleeing South Waziristan. These operations involved more forces and were more comprehensive and aggressive. Unlike before, they did not end in peace deals with the militants.⁸⁶

In Swat, the army moved into key population centers along the floor of the valley and retook most government centers. The militants fought pitched battles but eventually withdrew into the hills, where they continued to target government positions through ambushes and suicide attacks. The government had barely secured the valley before engaging in yet another round of peace talks in May 2008, after nearly six months of heavy fighting. The Swat operations were the most serious effort so far to uproot the Taliban, but they were still not enough. The insurgents retained control over most outlying areas and returned to populated areas as the army pulled back. In June, Maulana Fazlullah, the leader of the Taliban in Swat, abrogated his peace accord with the government and resumed attacks, in which several ISI officers were killed.

The military pushed additional forces into Swat, but pulled back again in early 2009 and signed yet another peace agreement with the insurgents that involved additional concessions.⁸⁷ The agreement soon broke down. In May 2009, the army more than doubled its troop presence in Swat, taking troops from its eastern front after India pledged to reduce tensions along the border. The army pushed

⁸⁶ This shift is captured best in Haider Ali Hussein Mullick, “Recalibrating U.S.-Pakistan Relations,” *Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2012.

⁸⁷ Jones and Fair, *Counterinsurgency*, 66-68.

through the entire valley, pursued the militants into the hills, killed many of its leaders, and forced the rest to flee. Some 300 soldiers were killed in the operation. By June, the Taliban's control over Swat had been largely broken. Unlike past operations, those in the spring and summer of 2009 did not end in a peace agreement with the militants. Instead, the writ of the government was restored in most areas and sufficient forces were left behind to prevent the insurgents from returning in strength.⁸⁸

In South Waziristan, the army resumed aerial and artillery bombardment in January 2008, followed by limited ground maneuvers. Baitullah Mehsud counter-attacked, leading 600-700 militants against the Sararogha Fort, a heavily fortified and strategically important outpost dating back to the colonial era. The fort was completely over-run and 22 soldiers were killed.⁸⁹ Militants also captured several smaller forts. Much of the tribe appeared to have mobilized against the government. The army bombed and shelled suspected militant positions across the area, blocked shipments of food, and sent tanks into South Waziristan for the first time.⁹⁰ The non-combatant population fled all but a handful of villages in the Mehsud areas of South Waziristan, turning the entire region into a virtual free-fire zone. The army declared the area free of militants and pulled back into its bases.⁹¹ The TTP quickly infiltrated back into South Waziristan. The suicide training camps run by Qari Hussein were re-established, and fighting resumed.⁹²

In August 2009, Baitullah Mehsud was killed in a U.S. drone strike in August, causing disarray in the leadership of the TTP. Then, in October, as suicide attacks across Pakistan reached new heights, the army launched major ground operations in South Waziristan for the

⁸⁸ Ahmed Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 137-44.

⁸⁹ "Militants Over-run Paramilitary Fort," *Dawn*, January 17, 2008.

⁹⁰ "Gunships Pound Militant Stronghold," *Daily Times*, January 22, 2008; "Baitullah Warns Government Against Entering His Area," *Dawn*, January 22, 2008.

⁹¹ Alamgir Bhattani, "Baitullah Orders Militants to Stop Attacks in FATA, NWFP," *Dawn*, April 24, 2008.

⁹² Jones and Fair, *Counterinsurgency*, 62.

first time – scattering the TTP and forcing it to flee. The military struck deals with Bahadur and Nazir, who controlled the adjacent lands to the north and south. The two commanders agreed to remain neutral in regard to the operations in South Waziristan and to deny sanctuary to TTP militants.⁹³ Those that attempted to flee to North Waziristan were forcibly evicted, leading to clashes between Bahadur's men and TTP cadres.⁹⁴ The bulk of the TTP fled to Orakzai agency, where it struggled to set up new bases amidst local opposition and frequent airstrikes. Unlike in earlier operations, the army maintained its presence in South Waziristan and prevented the insurgents from returning to the agency. This time, no peace deal was signed.

In Bajaur, the military launched a series of major operations in August 2008. These were reportedly aimed at Arab, Chechen, and Uzbek fighters associated with al Qaeda and led by a militant from northeast Afghanistan known as Ziaur Rahman. Many had taken refuge in a network of tunnels in the mountains built to withstand a long siege. The insurgents were well trained and well led, and were armed with heavy weapons and sophisticated communications equipment. In the Loi Sam area of Bajaur, a long-time stronghold for various militant groups, including al Qaeda, 60 Frontier Corps soldiers were reportedly killed and another 55 captured.⁹⁵

The operations in Bajaur were the largest yet conducted in the tribal areas. Several hundred thousand people were displaced in the fighting, which involved heavy use of airpower and artillery. The army razed nearly every house connected to the tunnel system. These tactics took a heavy toll on the civilian population and put enormous pressure on tribal leaders to seek an end to the fighting. The army insisted that the tribes act against the militants and those who harbored them, or face continual air and artillery bombardment.

⁹³ "Pakistan Cuts Deal with Anti-American Militants," Associated Press, October 19, 2009.

⁹⁴ Franco, "The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan."

⁹⁵ "Foreign Militants Target of Bajaur Operation," Daily Times, August 15, 2008; Jane Perlez, "Pakistanis Mired in Brutal Battle to Oust Taliban," New York Times, November 11, 2008.

Three months into the Bajaur operations, leaders of the Salarzai, a key tribe in Bajaur, raised a *lashkar* to fight the TTP. Many of the fighters in the *lashkar* were from another local tribe, the Mamoon. The tribal militia targeted suspected militants from the Mamoon tribe and burned the homes of those believed to support them. In November 2008, a suicide bomber killed the commander of the *lashkar* and 22 of its members – the first of many suicide attacks on Salarzai leaders as a result of their opposition to the TTP.⁹⁶ Sections of the Mamoon tribe later formed militias as well, under pressure from the army. They too faced retaliation from the Taliban.

Unlike in other parts of the frontier, where *lashkars* were raised under government pressure, tribal levies in Bajaur pushed the Taliban out of many areas and held ground cleared by the army. In some places, *lashkars* fought alongside government forces. Yet, these gains were limited and localized, and in many cases temporary. Traditionally, tribal levies were meant to be raised for a limited period of time to achieve a specific objective, not to provide replacements for permanent police or military forces. As the war between the government and the TTP raged on, it became increasingly difficult for tribal leaders to keep their men mobilized.

The tribal levies took heavy casualties, compounding their difficulties. Hundreds of tribal leaders associated with pro-government militias were killed in suicide bombings and other targeted killings. Many civilians were killed in these bombings, which appeared to target the tribes themselves rather than their leaders and militiamen. In some cases, suicide bombers blew themselves up in the middle of tribal gatherings, killing more than 100 people in a single attack. As tensions escalated, tribal militias in Bajaur became increasingly aggressive – launching offensive operations beyond their tribal lands, destroying the homes of those suspected of supporting the Taliban, and engaging in targeted killings.

By early 2009, the military, with the help of tribal militias, had retaken much of Bajaur, and began to slow the tempo of its operations. *Lashkars* continued to patrol the agency, especially in areas along the

⁹⁶ “Suicide Bomber Strikes at Pakistani Tribal Meeting in Bajaur,” *The Long War Journal*, November 6, 2008.

border with Afghanistan, and the army retained a substantial presence. Insurgents continued to clash sporadically with tribal and government forces – especially close to the border with Afghanistan – but the Taliban’s control over Bajaur was largely broken. The government signed a peace deal with the leaders of the agency’s three main tribes whereby the latter agreed to keep their militias mobilized and prevent the militants from returning in strength.⁹⁷ Unlike past agreements, this deal apparently excluded Taliban commanders, most of whom had fled to Afghanistan.

Political endeavors

While escalating operations against the TTP, the government struggled to maintain its agreements with Pakistani militants focused on the war in Afghanistan – especially Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan and Mullah Nazir in South Waziristan – and continued to treat them as potential allies. The military also sought new agreements with lesser known commanders in other agencies, including in Bajaur. The strategy, as before, was to politically isolate the irreconcilable elements of the Pakistani Taliban and limit serious military action to those factions believed to pose the greatest threat to the Pakistani state.

Bahadur initially joined the TTP as its deputy commander, greatly raising Islamabad’s fears of a Pakistani Taliban united against the state. The military struggled to keep Bahadur and his followers from turning completely against the government. Despite his initial support to Baitullah Mehsud, the army hesitated to take military action. As suicide attacks across Pakistan escalated and the army stepped up its operations, Bahadur soon distanced himself from the TTP, restated his intention to abide by the 2006 peace accords, and renewed his commitment to the insurgency in Afghanistan.

Mullah Nazir in South Waziristan kept his distance from the TTP. He condemned its tactics, especially the suicide bombings, and criticized Baitullah Mehsud for distracting attention from the war against the United States and NATO. The followers of Mullah Nazir and

⁹⁷ Hasbanullah Khan, “28-Point Peace Agreement Signed in Bajaur Agency,” Daily Times, March 12, 2009.

Baitullah Mehsud clashed openly in South Waziristan in 2007 and 2008. Mullah Omar, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, abrogated the TTP as well, and called again on his followers to refrain from violence inside Pakistan. Sirajuddin Haqqani did the same. Spokesmen for the *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, which had become increasingly involved in northeast Afghanistan while remaining largely focused on India and Kashmir, repeatedly insisted that the organization had nothing to do with the TTP's war inside Pakistan.⁹⁸

In November 2008, the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* launched 10 coordinated attacks in India's financial capital, Mumbai, killing more than 170 people – causing India to once again threaten military action against Pakistan. Militants from across the spectrum offered to declare a ceasefire and support the army if India invaded Pakistan. A military spokesman declared Baitullah Mehsud, Maulana Fazlullah, and other TTP commanders “patriots” prepared to defend the nation.”⁹⁹ The bonhomie was brief, as it soon became clear that India would not attack, and the episode was quickly forgotten within Pakistan. The incident nonetheless suggested that the military still looked on the Pakistani Taliban – including the worst offenders among the TTP – as part of its defense against India.

The military's peace accords with Nazir and Bahadur threatened to break down in 2009 as U.S. drone strikes targeted a growing number of Pakistani militants responsible for attacks in Afghanistan – many of them loyal to the two commanders. Revelations that the military had been secretly involved in the drone campaign made matters worse. Nazir and Bahadur held meetings with Baitullah Mehsud in early 2009 and threatened to unite against the government if the drone strikes did not cease. In April, there were clashes between Nazir's men and security forces in South Waziristan – the first such incident in two years.¹⁰⁰ In June, militants loyal to Bahadur killed 16 soldiers in a large-scale ambush in North Waziristan. Bahadur claimed the attack

⁹⁸ “Taliban Wield the Axe Ahead of New Battle,” Asia Times, January 24, 2008.

⁹⁹ Hamid Mir, “Army Official Calls Baitullah, Fazlullah ‘Patriots,’” The News, December 1, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ “Clashes End Lull in South Waziristan,” Daily Times, April 14, 2009.

was in retaliation for the government's support for US drone strikes.¹⁰¹ In July, Bahadur and Nazir jointly scrapped their peace accords with the government.

These developments were a bad omen for the army, given the scale of violence across the country and the number of forces committed to operations in other areas along the frontier. The military's alliance with Nazir and Bahadur was a cornerstone of its strategy against the TTP. The government reiterated its intention to abide by the original peace accords, even if the militants did not, and worked feverishly behind the scenes to maintain its alliance with the two commanders. Despite pressure from the United States, the army stated publicly that it would not launch major operations in North Waziristan.¹⁰² Sporadic clashes continued, including several suicide attacks on military positions in North Waziristan, but the two commanders stopped short of declaring war on the government, and actually cooperated with the army against the TTP during operations in South Waziristan in October 2009. Though the alliance with Bahadur and Nazir ultimately held, it was clear that the military's control over the two commanders was limited and that their cooperation was fragile and conditional.

While hammering away at the more irreconcilable elements of the insurgency, the military went to great pains to maintain its peace accords with militant groups that remained focused on Afghanistan and refrained from violence inside Pakistan. Permitting Pakistani Taliban fighters to go to Afghanistan to fight was a key element of the government's efforts to minimize attacks inside Pakistan. The military was careful to spare the followers of Pakistani commanders Mullah Nazir and Hafiz Gul Bahadur, as well as the Afghan Taliban loyal to Mullah Omar and Sirajuddin Haqqani. The expansion of the US drone campaign to the Taliban in Pakistan in 2009 threatened to unravel these carefully built alliances, yet they largely held. The military left open the option of talks with the remnants of the TTP as well, providing they agreed to cease attacks inside Pakistan.

¹⁰¹ Joshua Partlow, "Deadly Ambush in Tribal Region Could Indicate Looming Threat to Pakistan's Army," *Washington Post*, June 30, 2009.

¹⁰² "Army Rules out Operation in NWA," *The News*, July 2, 2009.

The years 2007-2009 were a dark period for Pakistan. What had before been a fractious collection of tribally based militant groups with local agendas easily manipulated by the intelligence services became a coherent movement that declared war on the government. The Taliban expanded its control into the settled areas, and took the fight to the cities and centers of power through suicide bombings. It was not until the violence reached crisis proportions that the Pakistani military finally took a stand against the insurgency by launching major operations simultaneously in multiple agencies and by holding ground taken from the insurgents rather than engaging in hasty peace deals and pulling back. By the end of the year the TTP had begun to fracture, but it remained a potent force.

The war goes on: 2010-2012

By early 2010, the military appeared to have slowed the Taliban's momentum inside Pakistan. For the first time since 2001, the government demonstrated resolve to stand against the Taliban, or at least those factions that sought to challenge the writ of the Pakistani state. The TTP's control was largely broken in Bajaur, the Mehsud areas of South Waziristan, and Swat. The death of Baitullah Mehsud in August 2009 had left the TTP without a strong leader. The Pakistani Taliban nonetheless remained dangerous. Thousands of militants continued to operate in the mountains and other safe areas along the frontier, from which they ambushed convoys, attacked government positions, and carried out suicide bombings. Some found sanctuary in northeast Afghanistan, where they began to build bases from which to launch new offensives inside Pakistan.

The TTP under strain

The military maintained its pressure on the TTP following operations in 2009 and the death of Baitullah Mehsud. By the end of 2010, the Pakistani Taliban no longer had the appearance of a coherent entity. The TTP, which had always been little more than an umbrella group tying together a number of local Pakistani commanders, became increasingly fractured. Coordination between various groups, which had been the hallmark of the TTP from 2007 through 2009, appeared to have broken down substantially, though not

completely.¹⁰³ New splinter groups emerged, and there was open fighting between factions. By the end of 2011, there were an estimated 50-60 local outfits operating under the banner of the Pakistani Taliban.¹⁰⁴

Power struggles between the remaining factions of the TTP emerged into the open. There was open fighting between Hakimullah Mehsud, who was Baitullah Mehsud's successor, and Waliur Rehman, one of his rivals for control over the movement – as well as between Hakimullah Mehsud and the TTP commanders Faqir Mohammad and Maulana Fazlullah in Bajaur and Swat. In early 2012, Hakimullah Mehsud accused Faqir Mohammad of negotiating with the government and excommunicated him.¹⁰⁵ The military exploited these differences and sowed further divisions in the TTP's ranks – divisions that deepened as the insurgents took heavy casualties in military operations, lost many of their leaders in targeted strikes, and found it increasingly difficult to move and communicate.¹⁰⁶ The Pakistani Taliban also lost many supporters as a result of growing extremism, suicide bombings, and civilian deaths. Some militant commanders admitted that they were facing manpower shortages and finding it more difficult to recruit suicide bombers.¹⁰⁷

Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Mullah Nazir continued to deny sanctuary to the remnants of the TTP, resulting in sporadic fighting between the two commanders and the followers of Hakimullah Mehsud.¹⁰⁸ The remnants of the TTP took refuge in Orakzai, Khyber, and Kurram agencies, where they met with local hostility and were hounded by

¹⁰³ "Pakistan Taliban No Longer a Unified Group," *The News*, November 15, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Khattak, "The Complicated Relationship between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban"; "Jirga Warns TTP Supporters of Punishment," *The News*, March 7, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Franco, "Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan."

¹⁰⁷ "Pakistani Taliban Almost Crippled, on the Run," *The News*, March 4, 2010.

¹⁰⁸ "Mehsud Militants Agree to Leave SWA," *The News*, May 25, 2010; "Tribesmen Vow to Drive Out Mehsud Militants," *The News*, June 5, 2010.

repeated airstrikes and ground operations. Many also took refuge in Karachi, where they stoked sectarian and ethnic tensions, and became heavily involved in kidnapping and extortion. They earned the enmity not just of the Karachi police, but also of the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), a powerful political organization that controlled much of the city.¹⁰⁹

The military continued to hold back on operations in North Waziristan, even as US pressure intensified as a result of terrorist attacks in Kabul linked to the Haqqani Network, which was based in areas under Bahadur's control. Bahadur threatened an "endless war" against the Pakistani military if it pushed into North Waziristan.¹¹⁰ A growing number of drone strikes in North Waziristan took a heavy toll on Bahadur's forces, causing further tensions with the government.

For the military, conducting new operations in Kurram and Orakzai agencies, where many TTP militants had taken refuge, and maintaining the pressure in South Waziristan and Bajaur remained a higher priority than striking North Waziristan, where most of the militants were focused on the war in Afghanistan and posed little immediate threat to the Pakistani state.¹¹¹ According to some estimates, there were at least 10,000 battle-hardened insurgents in North Waziristan at the end of 2011. There may have been as many as 60,000 potential fighters, depending on the degree to which the tribes might have come together to resist a military offensive.¹¹² The government seemed as keen as ever to keep these militants focused on Afghanistan and prevent the Pakistani Taliban from regaining their lost unity.

¹⁰⁹ Imtiaz Ali, "Karachi Becoming a Taliban Safe Haven?" CTC Sentinel, January 13, 2010; "Parts of Karachi are Under Taliban Grip: MQM," The News, February 6, 2010.

¹¹⁰ "The Militants' Swift Reaction," The News, October 26, 2010.

¹¹¹ Karin Brulliard and Haq Nawaz Khan, "After Major South Waziristan Offensive, Pakistan Still Faces Serious Obstacles," Washington Post, November 19, 2010.

¹¹² "The North Waziristan Trap," The News, November 17, 2011.

In early 2012, there appeared to be an emerging recalibration of forces among the Taliban-inspired groups along the frontier. In February, there were reports of ongoing talks between members of the Hakimullah Mehsud faction of the TTP, the Quetta Shura Taliban under Mullah Omar, the Haqqani Network, Bahadur's group, and the followers of Mullah Nazir in South Waziristan. The focus of the talks was reportedly to mend relations with the Pakistani government and to focus greater effort on the war in Afghanistan as U.S. and NATO forces began to draw down. There was considerable speculation that these meetings were the beginning of a comprehensive peace agreement between the military and the Pakistani Taliban. The government denied playing any role in these talks.¹¹³

A new sanctuary in northeast Afghanistan

A new threat emerged in 2010 as militants from Bajaur, Mohmand, and Swat found safe haven in Kunar and Nuristan provinces in northeast Afghanistan. There they gathered in large numbers and forged alliances with Afghan Taliban commanders and al Qaeda cadres. The Taliban commander in northeast Afghanistan – an Afghan named Qari Ziaur Rahman, known for his strong links to al Qaeda – welcomed militants fleeing Pakistan and helped them carry out cross-border attacks. He also sent some of his own forces to Mohmand and Bajaur to fight the Pakistani army.¹¹⁴ Rahman was the target of several US raids and other operations in 2010, but nonetheless managed to operate on both sides of the border unharmed.¹¹⁵

U.S. forces had begun pulling out of Kunar and Nuristan in northeast Afghanistan – a remote region of high mountains that borders Mohmand and Bajaur tribal agencies – in October 2009. The Taliban quickly filled the vacuum. By the summer of 2010, the insurgents were openly governing large parts of Nuristan and some

¹¹³ Bill Roggio, "Halt Attacks on Pakistani Military: Siraj Haqqani", *The Long War Journal*, February 12, 2012.

¹¹⁴ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Taliban Take Over Afghan Province," *Asia Times*, October 29, 2009.

¹¹⁵ "ISAF captures al Qaeda's top Kunar commander," *Long War Journal*, April 6, 2011, citing report in the *Wall Street Journal* that same day.

parts of Kunar and operating training camps. In September 2011, the governor of Nuristan claimed that six of the province's eight districts were under Taliban control.¹¹⁶

The region became a sanctuary for Afghan and Pakistani militants from a variety of organizations, as well as members of al Qaeda.¹¹⁷ Fighters from across the spectrum appeared to be working together throughout the mountainous border region spanning northeast Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan. The *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, which had become increasingly involved in the insurgency in northeast Afghanistan, was well entrenched in parts of Kunar. Several senior *Lashkar-e-Toiba* operatives were killed in raids, indicating that the group had become a priority target for U.S. special operations forces.

A number of al Qaeda fighters had also taken refuge in Kunar after being instructed to do so by Osama Bin Laden. In 2011, there were reports of multiple al Qaeda run camps training Afghan and Pakistani militants in Kunar. Dozens of Arab militants, as well as Pakistani fighters affiliated with al Qaeda, were killed in US airstrikes on these camps.¹¹⁸ In Kunar, al Qaeda and *Lashkar-e-Toiba* operatives appeared to be working and training together. Members of both organizations have been killed in airstrikes there.¹¹⁹ The extent to which TTP members were tied into these networks and trained in these camps is unclear. There is little doubt, however, that the region had become a hub for a variety of different militant organizations involved in attacks on US, Afghan, and Pakistani forces.

From new bases in northeast Afghanistan, Pakistani militants – most of them followers of Maulana Fazlullah and Faqir Mohammad, forced out of Swat and Bajaur during operations in 2009 – were able to gather in large numbers and carry out increasingly deadly attacks on

¹¹⁶ “Taliban Govern Openly in Nuristan,” Long War Journal, April 6, 2011.

¹¹⁷ Syed Saleem Shahzad. “Taliban Take Over Afghan Province,” Asia Times, October 29, 2009; “Al Qaeda Makes Afghan Comeback,” Associated Press, April 6, 2011.

¹¹⁸ “Al Qaeda Makes Afghan Comeback; “ISAF captures al Qaeda’s top Kunar commander,” Long War Journal, April 6, 2011.

¹¹⁹ “Al Qaeda emir for Kunar, deputy, and facilitator killed in airstrikes,” Long War Journal, August 5, 2012.

Pakistani forces in Mohmand, Bajaur, and Dir.¹²⁰ The Taliban launched repeated raids on pro-government villages, kidnapping tribesmen and holding them for ransom in hideouts across the border. Many of these attacks involved hundreds of Pakistani and Afghan fighters operating in a coordinated fashion – often completely over-running border posts. When confronted, the insurgents fled back into Afghanistan.¹²¹ During this time, Pakistani and Afghan fighters were also involved in massed attacks on Afghan border posts.¹²²

The Taliban also infiltrated back into the more remote areas of Bajaur. The Pakistani military responded with renewed operations, beginning in early 2010 and continuing into 2012. The operations resulted in intense fighting and heavy casualties on both sides. Between January and August 2010 alone, an estimated 200 Pakistani soldiers were killed. The army claimed to have killed at least 1,800 militants during this period, many of them in airstrikes.¹²³ The military followed up with development projects, beginning with a new road to the border.¹²⁴

A number of villages near the border formed tribal levies to protect against attacks from Afghanistan. There was heavy fighting between Bajaur's pro-government *lashkars* and the Taliban. In some areas, Pakistani government forces fought alongside the *lashkars*. Elders in some villages threatened to carry out retaliatory raids against suspected militant hideouts on the Afghan side of the border.¹²⁵ The

¹²⁰ "Faqr owns cross-border attack in Bajaur Agency," The News, July 15, 2012.

¹²¹ Dastageer, "Blame Thy Neighbor."

¹²² "Border police among 63 killed in Kamdesh fighting," Pajhwok Afghan News, July 6, 2011.

¹²³ Tayyab Ali Shah. "Pakistan's Bajaur Agency Emerges as New Hub for Islamist Militancy," Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor, August 12, 2010.

¹²⁴ "Militants' network eliminated in Bajaur: corps commander," The News, November 30, 2010.

¹²⁵ "Afghan-based militants storm Bajaur villages," The News, 13 July 2012.

Taliban resumed suicide attacks on pro-government elders and tribal militias.

The military complained loudly about insurgent sanctuaries in Afghanistan – but there were few forces there to take action, and so the cross-border attacks continued. In 2011 and 2012, the Pakistani army fired thousands of artillery rounds across the border at suspected Taliban positions and villages where militants were believed to have taken refuge. These incidents caused major tensions between Islamabad and Kabul.¹²⁶ Afghanistan's Parliament forced the resignation of the country's defense and interior ministers in August 2012 amid criticisms over their failure to stop the Pakistani army from firing rockets and mortars into Afghanistan.

Tensions also grew between U.S. and Pakistani forces operating on opposite sides of the border. In late November 2011, a U.S. airstrike on a Pakistani military camp in Mohmand killed some 27 Pakistani soldiers, leading to a near breach in relations between Washington and Islamabad. U.S. forces had mistaken a Pakistani outpost on the border for an insurgent position and fired. This was not the first time that U.S. forces had crossed into Pakistani territory in pursuit of insurgents and fired on Pakistani military outposts. The incident marked the culmination of several years of growing tensions between U.S. and Pakistani forces in the northern border region, where the two militaries were pursuing different elements of the insurgency, often in close proximity. There was intense pressure on both sides to fire on suspected insurgent positions across the border and to engage in hot pursuit.

As US forces have pulled back from northeast Afghanistan, an increasingly interconnected insurgency has developed, spanning both sides of the border. Pakistani and Afghan Taliban fighters have found new sanctuaries from which to attack Afghan and Pakistani government forces. The Taliban are no longer just an Afghan problem, but span the Pashtun belt in both countries where Afghan and Pakistani militants are fighting – sometimes side-by-side – against both governments as well as Western forces. Distrust runs high between the

¹²⁶ “Pakistani Artillery Continues to Pound Afghan Province,” Washington Post, July 24, 2012.

Pakistani and Afghan governments and pervades both countries' security forces, preventing even tactical-level cooperation. Each prefers to see militants that might otherwise cause trouble within their borders carry out attacks elsewhere.

Final thoughts

This paper has covered the history of the Pakistani government's relationship with jihadist militants in Afghanistan and Kashmir from 1947 to 2001, and has reviewed the major events in Pakistan's war against militants along the country's western frontier since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. During the 1980s and 1990s, the military fought two unconventional wars on a massive scale along its eastern and western borders. The 1980s war in Afghanistan achieved its objectives, but at great cost to Pakistan's stability. The war left behind millions of refugees, an unstable Afghanistan, tens of thousands of radicalized young men, an expansive infrastructure of jihadist militancy in Pakistan outside the direct control of the state, and many other problems. The military then fought another covert campaign in Kashmir throughout the 1990s. The war in Kashmir failed to force the state's accession to Pakistan but instead caused greater terrorism and instability across the region.

The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 forced the Pakistani military to conduct operations for the first time in its history along the ungoverned tribal belt bordering Afghanistan. The result was a massive Taliban-inspired insurgency against the Pakistani state that threatened to engulf the country until the militants finally began to lose momentum in 2010. The government sought agreements with Pakistani Taliban commanders focused on Afghanistan, and largely left these commanders alone as long as they refrained from attacks inside Pakistan. The military then focused its efforts on those groups that insisted on fighting the Pakistani state.

The aim of Pakistan's operations against the Taliban was to contain the fallout from U.S. operations in Afghanistan and protect against attacks inside Pakistan. At no point did the military confront the Taliban in its entirety. The aim was always to reconcile with as much of the insurgency as possible, deflect it into Afghanistan, and confront directly only those factions that posed an imminent threat to Pakistan. Even during the worst violence, Baitullah Mehsud, who

was responsible for numerous insurgent and suicide attacks on Pakistani soldiers and civilians, was offered amnesty if only he would stop carrying out attacks inside Pakistan.

It was unrealistic for the United States to expect the Pakistani military to declare war on the Taliban and take on the entire movement simultaneously. The militants it did confront – in the Mehsud areas of South Waziristan, and in Bajaur, Mohmand, and Swat – brought the country close to the brink of collapse. Had the rest of the country's Taliban-affiliated militant groups turned on the government as well, Pakistan might very well have descended into chaos. There is little doubt that the military's intelligence wing sought to project power into Afghanistan through certain factions of the Taliban, especially the Haqqani Network in North Waziristan. It is also, true, however that the government's agreements with the militants were part of a survival strategy aimed at keeping the insurgency divided and minimizing violence inside Pakistan.

There little doubt that going after Sirajuddin Haqqani (and Hafiz Gul Bahadur, his protector among the tribesmen of North Waziristan) could cause a great deal of violence inside Pakistan. The militants in North Waziristan have said that if targeted they would cross into Afghanistan and carry out attacks from there, leading to the same sort of problem faced by the army in Bajaur where there have been frequent cross-border attacks from sanctuaries in Afghanistan.¹²⁷ Given Haqqani's contacts across southeastern Afghanistan and the impending withdrawal of U.S. forces from that area, the Pakistani military could be in for a long and ultimately futile fight.

Throughout its long struggle with elements of the Pakistani Taliban, the government sought to use military operations to manage or contain rather than defeat the insurgency. Those groups that insisted on targeting the Pakistani state were pounded from the ground and air until they agreed to hand over al Qaeda members and stop fighting the Pakistani government. Despite heavy use of indiscriminate firepower, the army consistently sought political solutions. In 2009 and 2010 the military backed away from this policy

¹²⁷ "The Militants' Swift Reaction," *The News*, October 26, 2010.

to some extent; however, constant dialogue with the militants combined with continual promises of amnesty has remained a cornerstone of the government's approach to the insurgency.

The ultimate goal for the Pakistani military was always a negotiated political solution. This objective was impossible to realize in its entirety as long as western forces remained committed to defeating the Taliban militarily in Afghanistan and insisted that the Pakistani army do the same on its side of the border. From the beginning of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, the working assumption among the Pakistani military leadership was that the Taliban could not be defeated militarily, that at some point there would be no choice but to seek a negotiated solution involving the organization's return to power in large parts of Afghanistan. It was, therefore, a fool's errand to declare war against the Taliban as a whole, especially if much of the movement was concerned mainly with fighting western forces in Afghanistan and posed little direct threat to Pakistan.

If western efforts to defeat the Taliban militarily in Afghanistan were, indeed, doomed to failure, then there was little reason for Pakistan to do more than absolutely necessary to contain the fallout of U.S. and NATO operations and prevent a breach in relations with Washington. For Pakistani generals who served during the *Mujahedeen's* war against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan, it was only a matter of time before western forces withdrew and left the war and its fallout to Pakistan; doing more against the Taliban would have little decisive impact on the ultimate outcome in Afghanistan and was therefore not worth the cost. The military focused instead on posturing itself for the inevitable U.S. withdrawal, as well as eventual negotiations with the Taliban in which Pakistan will, no doubt, play a crucial role.

The impending withdrawal of western forces from Afghanistan does not presage an end to the fighting on either side of the border, but rather a new stage in a conflict that has continued without respite since 1979. The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and years of pressure on Pakistan over the Taliban has, so far, been merely yet another interlude in an ongoing war.

Going forward, the Pakistani military will in all likelihood remain focused on containing the fallout from Afghanistan and fighting militants that insist on attacking the Pakistani state, while pushing as

many as possible into Afghanistan to fight with the Afghan Taliban. As additional western forces withdraw from eastern Afghanistan, militants keen to fight the Pakistani state will find refuge there. If the governments in Kabul and Islamabad remain hostile, militants on both sides of the border are likely to find sanctuary from which to carry out cross-border attacks, leading to a state of instability across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region that could endure for many years.

After more than a decade of close engagement and intense pressure, Washington's grand ambition to fundamentally change Pakistan's strategic and ideological outlook has largely failed. It does not appear that Pakistan ever made the great turn-around that was hoped for after September 2001, or that the U.S.-Pakistan relationship ever evolved beyond a "transactional" marriage of convenience. Pakistan's security establishment remains deeply divided over the nature of the Taliban threat and the best means to address it.

Much has changed in the government's thinking over the last 11 years. Yet the transition remains largely hesitant and partial. U.S. and NATO forces are pulling back from Afghanistan, and the Taliban is poised to regain at least some of its former power. At the same time, India has modernized its military and strengthened its alliances with the western powers. These trends create strong incentives for the military to, at the very least, retain the unconventional warfare option. The challenge for the United States going forward will be to ensure that Pakistan continues to move in the right direction and does not revert back to its earlier policies.

About the author

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