

Navigating Pakistan's Nexus with the Afghan Taliban: A Perspective of Religious Instrumentalism

Anees Wadud Khan¹

Abstract

Pakistan has supported the Afghan Taliban throughout its history. When the Taliban 1.0 seized the throne of Kabul in 1996, Pakistan soon recognized the Taliban's government and continued its support. Similarly, when Taliban 3.0 took over Kabul in 2021, Pakistan immediately started Taliban advocacy at various international forums. This paper seeks to analyze how Pakistan advanced Islamic nationalism through religious elites from the perspective of religious instrumentalism and why Pakistan has supported the Afghan Taliban. Similarly, it delves into how Pashtun nationalism has posed threats to Pakistan's ontology from the very outset. A qualitative approach has been used to design this research paper. The data for this study has been gathered from various primary and secondary sources, i.e., journals, books, speeches, magazines, X (formerly Twitter), etc. This data has been analyzed through discourse analysis. Ethnic nationalism has always created security concerns for Pakistan. When East Pakistan, now Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan based on Bengali nationalism, it became wary of Pashtun nationalism. During the 1970s, Pashtun nationalism was gaining ground across the Durand Line. Pakistan searched for various options to quash Pashtun nationalism because it could not afford to lose its other parts. The decision-makers in Islamabad found religious forces such as the Afghan Taliban and others as a strategic weapon to tackle Pashtun nationalism. Pakistan successfully neutralized Pashtun nationalism by forging a nexus with the Afghan Taliban because they were the adherents of Islamic nationalism, which aligned with Pakistan's ontology, Islamic nationalism. However, Pashtun nationalism was reinvigorated by the Pashtun Tahaffuz (Protection) Movement (PTM) and posed grave threats to the state's internal and external security. Therefore, it is the need of the hour to quash Pashtun nationalism with pragmatic measures, coherent strategies, and soft power.

Keywords: Afghan Taliban, religious instrumentalism, Islamic nationalism, Pashtun nationalism, Pashtun Tahaffuz (Protection) Movement (PTM)

¹ Independent Researcher and Scholar of International Relations - Pakistan

Introduction

Since the creation of Pakistan, Pashtun nationalism has threatened Pakistan's national security. In the Banu Resolution of June 1947, Pashtun nationalist leaders like Ghaffar Khan, Mirza Ali, Abdul Samad Khan, and others demanded that the Britishers should add a third option of choice for Independent Pashtunistan, which would be a separate state made up of the Pashtun-majority of North West Frontier Province (NWFP), or accession to Afghanistan. This demand came seven weeks before Pakistan was created (Ahmed R. K., 2022).

Later, the leaders of Pashtun nationalism were imprisoned by the Pakistani government when the country gained its independence because they advocated Pashtun nationalism, which was antithetical to Pakistani or Islamic nationalism, the cornerstone of Pakistan. The Pashtun nationalists ultimately began to support regional autonomy. Similarly, the situation improved in the second half of the 1950s and the 1960s when Pashtuns from different cities, for instance, Mardan, Peshawar, and Kohat, were integrated into state affairs (Rizwan Hussain, 2005). Likewise, the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan improved, particularly after the Tehran Accords.

However, in the 1970s, when Sardar Daoud Khan, an Afghan leader who had previously backed Pakistan's separatist efforts and had strong anti-Pakistan feelings, came to power. He began to promote violent leftist and nationalist leaders in Pakistan as an Afghan proxy. The Pakistani government discovered that the National Awami Party (NAP), its Pakhtun Zalmi wing, and some others were inciting violent activities in the country. Based on Bengali nationalism, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) separated from West Pakistan during this decade (Sufi, 2015). Zulfikar Ali Bhutto could not afford another East Pakistan-style disaster in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) or Baluchistan since he knew of the adverse effects of growing nationalist sentiments. Bhutto started looking for alternative options to combat the growing threat posed by Pashtun nationalism, embraced by Daoud's regime. Soon, the Bhutto administration found Ahmad Shah Masood and Gulbadin Hikmatyar to be possible proxies (Amin, 2010). Pakistan supported Hikmatyar in pursuing its interests, but when he focused more on Pashtun identity, Pakistan withdrew its support.

Furthermore, several Pakistani governments supported various religious groups in Afghanistan, primarily the Taliban during the 1990s, to further their national

security objectives. For instance, to quell Pashtun nationalism across the Durand line. In contrast to Pashtun nationalism, the Taliban were more interested in Islamic nationalism. The Taliban are therefore viewed as a strategic weapon by the Pakistani establishment. Later, Pashtun nationalism faded when Pakistan's constitution underwent its 18th amendment. The Awami National Party (ANP), the dominant voice of Pashtun nationalism at the time, had no other means of advancing Pashtun nationalism's cause against Pakistani or Islamic nationalism after its demands for provincial autonomy and identity (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) were met.

However, Pashtun nationalism was revived when the Mehsud Tahaffuz (Protection) Movement, also known as the Pashtun Tahaffuz (Protection) Movement (PTM), gained fame and prominence among Pashtuns. So, once Taliban 3.0 seized control of Kabul in 2021, Pakistan quickly began supporting them at various international forums. It was a great chance for Pakistan to suppress the revived Pashtun nationalism across the Durand line, and Pakistan took advantage of it. Before the Taliban took control, the Ashraf Ghani administration supported Pashtun nationalism and backed the PTM. Likewise, the leaders of PTM were explicitly criticizing the state and its powerful institutions. But Pakistan believes that the Taliban is an excellent weapon for stifling Pashtun nationalism because they adhere to Islamic nationalism. Therefore, Pakistan has supported the Taliban at various international forums such as the United Nations (UN) and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Various scholars like Kleiner, Ahmed, and others have discussed several causes and consequences of Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan and its support for the Afghan Taliban. Instances: to pursue a policy of strategic depth, to support a friendly regime in Afghanistan to minimize India's influence, and to halt the claim of Afghanistan on Pakistan's territories (Kleiner, 2014). Likewise, it has covered various consequences, for example, non-traditional security threats, i.e., extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking, narcoterrorism, etc. (Ahmed Z. S., 2021). However, this study claims that Pakistan supported the Afghan Taliban throughout its history mainly to quell Pashtun nationalism with the assistance of Islamic nationalism with the help of religious instrumentalists. It will be of great importance for the researcher to understand that Pakistan supports the Afghan Taliban primarily to quell Pashtu nationalism by using the lens of religious instrumentalism. This study is organized as follows. First, it will delve into the role of religious instrumentalists in promoting Islamic nationalism in Pakistan through the lens of religious

instrumentalism. Further, it will discuss how Pashtun nationalism can threaten Pakistan's sovereignty and why the support of the Taliban is essential for Pakistan. Finally, this study will provide some remedies, for ensuring Pakistan's internal and external security from the threats posed by Pashtun nationalism, in the conclusion.

Review of the Literature

The existing literature on Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban may be divided into two categories. The first category focuses on Pakistan's reasons for involvement in Afghanistan and its support for the Afghan Taliban. In a similar vein, the second category addresses Pakistan's repercussions from its assistance of the Afghan Taliban.

The first group of scholars discussed Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan. They claim that Pakistan's involvement is motivated by security, economic, political, and social factors. Pakistan must prioritize securing Afghanistan. They have a shared border of around 2,600 kilometers, and Afghanistan's instability will create security issues for Pakistan. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, and the United States (US) invaded Afghanistan in 2001, Pakistan became more actively involved in Afghanistan. Similarly, following the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, members of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda moved to Pakistan, significantly impacting the state's security (Borthakur, 2017).

Moreover, it was involved economically and dreamed of opening up trade with Central Asian states. Pakistan has exploited Afghanistan's internal situation for its strategic interests. Further, as an underdeveloped state, Pakistan aligned itself with the United States (US) because it needed financial and military aid and assistance. After the two pertinent incidents, i.e., when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Pakistan received massive military and economic aid from the United States (US). In return, Pakistan allowed the US to use its soil (Hilali, 2017).

Likewise, minimizing India's influence in Afghanistan, pursuing its policy of strategic depth, and encouraging a friendly regime in Kabul are the political reasons for Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan (Marvin G. Weinbaum, 2008). Pakistan supported the Afghan Taliban to minimize India's influence and avoid its encirclement. Pakistan reckons an Afghan government friendly to India will

threaten Pakistan's survival, especially during the India and Pakistan conflict. Therefore, Pakistan was more interested in the Taliban's reign from the very onset. Similarly, to halt Afghanistan from its claim over Pakistan's territories is another leading cause. The majority of the Afghani rulers claimed Pakistan's territories from the very outset, but the Taliban are not very interested in Pakistan's territories like other Afghani rulers. Pakistan has always considered religious forces, i.e., the Taliban, a strategic weapon (Khan, 2007).

The second group's scholars discuss the consequences of the Taliban's advocacy for Pakistan. When the Taliban seized the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in May 1997, it led Pakistan to earlier diplomatic recognition of the Taliban reign on May 25, 1997, which resulted in severe consequences. Pakistan had persuaded Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to follow it and recognize the Taliban. Abdul Sattar, a well-known former foreign minister of Pakistan, mentioned one of the consequences. He stated that it provoked international disapproval and criticism due to its recognition of Taliban rule. In advocacy of the Taliban, Pakistan failed to persuade the rest of the countries to recognize the Taliban government, or it could not get diplomatic support for the Taliban, maybe due to its harsh policies or human rights violations. Likewise, the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and others refused to recognize the Taliban government. However, due to the support of the Taliban, the most significant consequence was that Pakistan remained isolated worldwide.

Furthermore, due to the Taliban's support, Pakistan's relations with Iran, Russia, and even its close ally, China, became complicated. Likewise, this policy resented the Muslim Central Asian states because Pakistan has encouraged and supported the Taliban, who were involved in spreading extremism and terrorism in Central Asian states. All these states believed that the Taliban were giving sanctuary to other extremists and terrorists (Fraser, 2019).

Besides, support of the Taliban resulted in long-term consequences. For instance, non-traditional security threats, i.e., terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, cross-border migration, etc., have badly affected Pakistan. Likewise, Pakistan facilitated the US-Taliban peace deal, signed in Qatar in February 2020, and hosted different delegations of the Taliban during 2020-21. As the Taliban took over Kabul, India shut down all its diplomatic missions in Kabul, which we can consider a positive outcome because it was in Pakistan's national interest to exclude India from Afghanistan.

Moreover, Pakistan's concerns about other consequences, i.e., extremism, terrorism, refugees, and other non-tradition security threats, grew again (Ahmed Z. S., 2021).

The extant literature has fundamentally dealt with the causes and consequences of Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan and its nexus with the Afghan Taliban. It elucidates different reasons for the Taliban's support. Instances: to pursue a policy of strategic depth, to support a friendly regime in Afghanistan to minimize India's influence, and to halt the claim of Afghanistan on Pakistan's territories. Likewise, it has covered various consequences, for example, non-traditional security threats, i.e., extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking, narcoterrorism, etc. The existing literature has addressed these causes and consequences. However, there is a dearth of literature about Pakistan supporting the Afghan Taliban, mainly to suppress Pashtun Nationalism across the Durand line. The extant literature does not cover this cause. The presently available literature is adequate, and there is a gap when considering that Pakistan supported the Afghan Taliban to subdue Pashtun nationalism with the help of Islamic Nationalism. This study will close this gap.

Methodology

The qualitative approach has been used to design this research paper. This research study is descriptive and explanatory, which navigates Pakistan's nexus with the Afghan Taliban from the perspective of religious instrumentalism. Similarly, data is collected from various primary and secondary sources for this scholarship such as speeches, X (formerly Twitter) accounts, newspaper articles, journal articles, books, magazines, reports, and other online sources. After data collection, the data is analyzed through discourse analysis to understand how religious instrumentalists use discourse to shape people's perceptions and how the state exploits their discourse for strategic gains. Moreover, this research study is designed analytically.

Research Significance and Objectives

This research study is indispensable because it sheds light on Pakistan's relationship with the Afghan Taliban. Similarly, this scholarship explicates that Pakistan has successfully tackled nationalist elements, which posed threats to its security and survival, particularly after the late 1970s, through various strategies such as advocacy of Afghan Taliban, backing religious instrumentalists, and legislation, for instance, the 18th amendment. Furthermore, this research problem is vital to understanding

the rationale behind Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban throughout history. Moreover, several researchers have explained various causes of Pakistan's advocacy of the Afghan Taliban but this paper elucidates a unique cause that is Pakistan has forged a nexus with the Afghan Taliban primarily to deal with Pashtun nationalism. Besides, this research study is significant to understand how Pakistan allied with the religious instrumentalists to further its national interests through the lens of religious instrumentalism. Finally, this study is critical to delve into how foreign relations can shape the internal security of a state. The main objectives of this scholarship are to examine the roles of the religious instrumentalist in advancing Pashtun nationalism across the Durand line, to understand the rationale behind the support of Pakistan for the Afghan Taliban, and to address how Pashtun nationalism threatens the security and survival of the state.

Religious Elites' Role in the Advancement of Islamic Nationalism in Pakistan

Understanding the instrumentalist viewpoint, especially the religious instrumentalist perspective, is essential to understanding the role of the religious elites in promoting Islamic nationalism in Pakistan. Religious instrumentalism signifies the strategic use of religion to gain non-religious objectives such as political control. Religion can be used as a means to achieve the end. The political actors exploit religious beliefs to gain support and overwhelm opposition. Religious instrumentalists use religious rituals and interpret narratives to achieve a particular aim. According to this theory, political elites use religious principles and influence religious organizations to further their political objectives (Huang, 2019). Similarly, they use religion to mobilize the masses for a specific cause. Through religious discourse, they can shape the masses' perceptions. They can galvanize communities into action by presenting political goals aligned with religious duties, such as Jihad, a holy war. The scholars of religious instrumentalists argue that a dominant religion increases the possibility that political elites will link with religious elites, mainly through regulating religion (Zev Maoz, 2020).

All the aforementioned assumptions of religious instrumentalism can be applied to Pakistan's nexus with the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan's elites, both military and political, have backed the religious elites such as Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, Maulana Fazal ur Rehman, the Afghan Taliban, and others, who are the adherents of Islamic nationalism, to stabilize its internal and external security from the threat of Pashtun nationalism and gain other strategic objectives across the Durand Line. The

instrumental use of religion allowed Pakistan to navigate its nexus with the Afghan Taliban and advance its political objectives such as quashing Pashtun nationalism and gaining influence in Afghanistan. How the elites of Pakistan forged a nexus with religious instrumentals and advanced Islamic nationalism to tackle Pashtun nationalism can be further understood in the upcoming sections.

Pakistan's Nexus with the Religious Instrumentalists to Advance Islamic Nationalism

The state employs religion as a tool to accomplish particular objectives. The three components of Pakistan's religious elites are the local Maulvis, knowledgeable Maulanas (Ulama), and the Pirs and Mashaikhs (spiritual leaders). They hold a conventional viewpoint and use sermons or addresses to influence people to increase their influence within the political system. In every Muslim society, religious elites have great significance. During the British rule in the subcontinent, Ulema played a crucial role in the 1857 War of Independence. Likewise, they played indispensable roles in the First World War and the politics of the subcontinent. The same goes for Pakistan. In Pakistan, from Maulana Madni, who proposed the 1949 Objective Resolution, to Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, an advocate of the Afghan Taliban, they have a significant role in state affairs. Most of the Ulema belongs to the Deobandi or Bareilvi school of thought. Besides Ulema, the Pirs are a crucial part of the religious elite. These Pirs have always played a part in advancing Islam, and the Khanaqah, or shrine of Muslim Sufi saints has historically served as a source of spiritual direction for Muslim rulers. Khanaqah played a significant role in the development of Islam and its reputation in India and Pakistan.

These religious elites have been influential in Afghan affairs for a long time. During the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union and later, during the Taliban Rule, their role became more important. Islamist organizations in Afghanistan looked up to Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan as a role model and mentor. Hizbi-Islami leader Gulbadin Hikmatyar shared ideologies with Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). To advance Islamic nationalism, increase its influence in Afghanistan, and combat anti-Pakistan forces like Pashtun nationalism, the Pakistani establishment used JI. It formed a relationship with Gulbadin Hikmatyar, who prefers Islam to Pashtun Identity. Pakistan, after that, stopped supporting Hikmatyar as he adopted a Pashtun nationalist stance. Although the ISI-JI and Hikmatyar scheme failed to

implement pro-Pakistan governance in Kabul. However, it was somewhat effective in driving the Soviets out of Afghanistan.

Fortunately, Pakistan discovered the Taliban in the 1990s while looking for a new friendly administration in Afghanistan to further its objectives. Jamiat-Ulmae-Islam (JUI), the principal protagonist of the Taliban in Pakistan, is a major Deobandi political party that Pakistan used to further its goals. Fazal-ur-Rehman, a member of the religious elite, developed close relationships with the ISI, the Army, and General Naseer-Ullah Babar, who served as Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and later Benazir Bhutto's top Afghan adviser. Baber was in the process of civilianizing the Afghan Policy when ISI decided to make use of the Taliban's Deobandi ideology and JUI's links to the Taliban after realizing the JI-Hikmatyar axis had failed to bring about a pro-Pakistani government. Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman actively advocated for the Taliban under this policy. He offered assistance and support on various levels, including diplomatic and financial. He visited Saudi Arabia, Washington, and the Gulf states, where he received significant financial support (Fatima, 2018).

Moreover, after the Taliban 3.0 revival in 2021, Pakistan sent a delegation of Ulema headed by a well-known religious elite, Mufti Taqi Usmani, for talks with the Taliban (Yousaf, 2022). All this reveals a convergence of interests and harmony between religious elites, and military and civil bureaucratic governing elites. The religious elites help Pakistan's goal of advancing Islamic nationalism to subdue Pashtun nationalism and enhance their political influence in Pakistan.

Pashtun Nationalism as a Threat to Pakistan's Sovereignty

Pakistan was created in 1947 based on the Two Nation Theory. Islamic nationalism was the foundational stone of Pakistan, and it cannot endure other nationalism, such as Pashtun nationalism. Islam was meant to be the glue that brought together many different communities with different languages and cultural identities (Sheikh, Pashtun Nationalism; Politics and Talibanization, 2016). In the Banu Declaration of 1947, Pashtun nationalist leaders like Ghaffar Khan and others demanded an independent Pashtunistan or accession to Afghanistan in opposition to Pakistan's establishment (Antonio Giustozzi, 2008). The leaders of the Pashtun nationalists and the Afghan rulers Daoud Khan and Zahir Shah attempted to incite Pashtun nationalism against Pakistan. Across the Durand line, they had sparked Pashtun nationalism and questioned Pakistan's authority. However, Pakistan

responded by establishing numerous Madaris, religious schools, in KPK and Baluchistan to promote and teach a strict form of Islam to replace Pashtun nationalism with Islamic nationalism (M. Chatarji Miller, 2021). Taliban leaders, who also espouse Islamic nationalism, were trained in those madrassas. Pakistan has supported the Taliban and assisted them in controlling the throne of Kabul during the 1990s.

Talibanization and Securitization of the erstwhile Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA)

The erstwhile Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) area continued to be the scene of two horrific wars: The Afghan-Soviet War and the War on Terror. The former caused the Talibanization, and the latter contributed to the securitization of the region at large. Talibanization and securitization both altered the social fabric.

Talibanization refers to the social and political process of copying the religious, and political ideologies and lifestyle of the Taliban (Ahrari, 2000). It can also be defined as a movement, Socio-religious, that wants to impose its rule and authority on the region based on the model of the Afghan Taliban (Zaidi, 2008). The religious foundations of Talibanization can be traced back to the establishment of Madaris, Islamic seminaries, which have played a vital role in the process of Talibanization in Pakistan. The roots of the Madaris can be traced back to the era of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He founded Madina's first Madrassa in a Masjid (Prophet's Mosque). Likewise, the creation of Darul Uloom Deoband in 1866 has played a vital role in religious education in the Indian Subcontinent.

When Pakistan came into being in 1947, the numbers of madaris were increasing at a slower pace during the first decade. However, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s, the role and numbers of Madaris had grown at a rapid pace. The Madaris were teaching free Islamic education. Therefore, the parents were sending their children to these Madaris because they were not in a position to afford public or private schools.

The majority of the Afghan Taliban leadership are the alumni of Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqani, University of Jihad, in KPK led by Maulana Sami-ul-Haq. The rise of such religious schools affected the social, economic, and cultural lifestyle of erstwhile FATA. They give rise to the process of Talibanization. Under Zia's rule, the Madaris

were established primarily to achieve the state's national interests such as quashing Pashtun nationalism, recruiting mujahideen for the Soviet-Afghan war to tackle the Soviet threat, and gaining the support of the religious parties.

Pakistan allied with the religious elites. For instance, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, leader of Hezb-e-Islami. Pakistan backed the mujahideen to counter different threats emanating from Afghanistan. However, at the start of the 1990s, when Pakistan realized that the Hikmatyar group had become weak in achieving its national interest, it turned towards the Afghan Taliban to pursue its interests. This faction was founded by Mullah Muhammad Omar, who was an imam (cleric) in Afghanistan's province of Kandahar's local mosque in the 1990s. Pakistan has supported the Afghan Taliban. In 1996 they took over the throne of Kabul.

Without a doubt, the FATA region, throughout its history, remained deprived of political institutions. Political party affiliation, party-based elections, congregations, and protests were banned explicitly in the area. The region was known as *Alaqa Ghair* or foreign land. The repressive Frontier Crimes Regulation Act (FCR), implemented by the British to dominate this territory, prohibited locals from seeking an appeal, providing evidence, or going to court to contest an arrest (Sheikh, *Pashtun Nationalism; Politics and Talibanization*, 2016). Even though FATA was a part of Pakistan, the country's constitution did not apply there, depriving the general public of their constitutional rights until the 25th constitutional amendment. It turned locals into state subjects rather than citizens, which caused pain in the hearts of the FATA people. The Mullahs replaced Maliks and Khans, who were respected members of the tribal regions' social order. Hujra, a place of social and political interaction, was taken over by the mosque, or *Masjid*. Internally displaced persons (IDPs), Watan Cards, checking at checkpoints, collective punishments, and incarceration on terrorism-related charges are a few examples of the people's heinous suffering due to securitization. As a result, the public became more radicalized (Ahmed R. Q., 2002).

When a particular issue is constructed within a nation, society, or other political entity through a successful speech act as a security concern or an existential threat to a referent object, requiring urgent and emergency measures i.e., military actions to tackle the threat is known as securitization. The roots of the securitization of terrorism in the FATA region can be traced back to the British arrival in the 19th century. However, there are various causes of the securitization of FATA i.e., FCR,

tradition or custom, no concept of political representation, basic rights, constitutional flaws, political agent's unlimited authority, Pak-Afghan porous border, which allows the militants to move freely despite of the fencing. The state had no robust control and presence in erstwhile FATA and it allowed a vacuum that has been filled by non-state actors such as Al-Qaida and other militant groups.

Militancy in FATA has been slowly securitized and the armed forces were late in conducting the counter-insurgency operations in FATA. Initially, the army did not respond well and focused on the low-intensity conflict. Because they focused more on external factors such as India to securitize. Later on, the army reckoned that a robust civilian component was vital in their efforts to counter insurgency in erstwhile FATA.

In the process of securitization of terrorism in the erstwhile FATA, both the militant groups and the security forces have created hatred and anger among the people of the erstwhile FATA. The people were fed up with the insecurity created by the militants and the bombardment and firing from the security forces. The securitization process badly affected the people of the erstwhile FATA and other affected areas. Particularly, due to various military operations the tribal lost their home, livestock, educational institutions, properties, lives, and so on. They faced difficulties in the movement and the majority of the people settled in other parts of Pakistan and became IDPS. Due to Operation Zarb-e-Azb, huge numbers of people were compelled to leave their homes to avoid collateral damage in tussles between the terrorists and security forces.

Because of the Rah-i-Nijat operation, Waziristan UNHCR has registered 350,000 IDPS in Tank and Dera Ismail Khan (DIK). Similarly, the military operations resulted in other consequences for the erstwhile FATA, too. They caused resentment among the tribal against the state and its robust institution, the army. Millions of people from FATA were displaced internally, which are called Internally Displaced people (IDPs), and lost their homes due to these operations. The already educationally deprived boys and girls became more deprived of education because the educational institutions were devastated by suicide bombing and military operations. The militant groups have banned the girls' education (Burki).

The erstwhile FATA suffered from humongous casualties. People lost their lives due to suicide bombings and shelling, terrorism increased, and sectarian violence

thrived. Military personnel have been injured and killed in a huge number. Their vehicles were destroyed. The terrorists targeted them in their camps, check posts, and convey. In brief, the military operations and terrorist and counter-terrorist efforts have affected the social, psychological, political, security, and economic situations of the FATA. All these happenings during the process of securitization in KPK specifically in FATA have set the stage for the emergence of PTM.

The Emergence of Pashtun Tahafuz (Protection) Movement (PTM) and the Re-emergence of Pashtun Nationalism

The PTM was earlier known as the Mehsud Tahaffuz (Protection) Movement (MTM), founded by Manzoor Ahmad Pashteen in 2014. It got prominence after 2018 when its leaders sought justice for his friend Naqeeb Ullah Mehsud, an IDP who was brutally murdered in an extrajudicial killing. This extrajudicial killing enraged the entire Pashtun community. The PTM exploited these situations and started demonstrations in different cities of KPK and Baluchistan. The PTM presented several demands to the government, including the immediate execution of Rao Anwar, who took part in the Naqeeb's fake encounter, the immediate cessation of extrajudicial killings of Pashtuns, the establishment of a judicial commission to look into Pashtun killings, the lifting of the curfew in FATA, and the removal of landmines from the FATA region. With time, the PTM increased its soft power and built a strong narrative against the state, mainly Pakistan's army. The discourse used by the PTM leaders aroused the Pashtun's sentiments and significantly provoked Pashtun nationalism. Manzoor Ahmed Pashteen and Ali Wazir explicitly criticized the Pakistan army's brass and held the Pakistan army responsible for the killings and displacement of Pashtuns (Shah, 2020).

Likewise, the PTM gets strong support from Afghanistan as well. Moreover, the Ghani government had ostensibly supported the PTM and its demonstrations. Ghani wanted to put pressure on Pakistan for his motives through Pashtun nationalism. Earlier, the PTM was famous in a few cities of KPK and Baluchistan. But contemporarily, the PTM has gained significant prominence among the Pashtuns, and its leaders are mobilizing the masses from the majority of cities of KPK and Baluchistan against the military establishment, which can prove precarious in the imminent future for Pakistan's security. The state should deal with the growing Pashtun nationalism with pragmatic measures. If the state ignores the growing Pashtun nationalism, it can face severe repercussions as it forgets Bengali

nationalism and loses its part (East Pakistan) to Bengali nationalism. Therefore, the state should stop playing with the sentiments of Pashtuns because Pashtun nationalism has the potential to threaten Pakistan's sovereignty.

Pakistan Forged a Nexus with the Afghan Taliban

Since 1947, Pakistan has faced challenges from Afghanistan. It initially opposed the establishment of Pakistan and voted against Pakistan at the UN. Nearly every Afghan ruler has backed Pashtun nationalism against Islamabad. Their irredentist claims on Pakistan's Pashtun territory compel Pakistan to develop a counter-strategy to combat Pashtun nationalism. Pakistan grabbed the chance to back the so-called mujahedeen in the war of 1979 when Afghanistan started acting more aggressively toward Pakistan in the 1970s. Similarly, when Gulbadin Hekmatyar turned back towards Pashtun nationalism, Pakistan withdrew its support from him after initially siding with him.

During the rule of Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan became one of the US's closest allies. He supported the Islamization of Pakistan and gave the Mujahideen a safe haven to carry out their armed activities. These jihadists received religious-military training in these madrassas, and KPK eventually became the center of religious seminaries for them (Weinbaum, 1991). During and after Zia's administration, there was a discernible increase in the number of religious seminaries that supported these madrassas through his obligatory Zakat collection. These madaris grew from 900 in the 1970s to 8000 official and 25000 unofficial madaris by 1988.

Later, Pakistan sided with the Afghan Taliban, who had little interest in Pashtun nationalism and preferred Islam to Pashtun identity. Their only concern was Islamic nationalism. Pakistan believed it was a great chance to confront Pashtun nationalism with Islamists and fundamentalists. Other factors have also contributed to the Taliban's support, but the main one was to restrain Pashtun nationalism. As a result, Pakistan helped the Afghan Taliban seize power in the 1990s by lending them support. In 1996, the Taliban set up its administration. Soon after, Pakistan recognized them and asked other nations, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, to follow suit.

After the 9/11 attacks, which triggered the US Global War on Terror and caused Islamabad to renounce its staunch support for the Afghan Taliban, Islamabad was

obliged to change its position. Afghanistan once more served as the backdrop for a conflict that lasted for two decades. During this time, Hamid Karzai, who had governed Afghanistan for 12 years, was succeeded by Ashraf Ghani, a fervent proponent of Pashtun nationalism who purportedly supported the PTM. After the US forces left Afghanistan in 2021, the Taliban 3.0 took control of the country—a result that Islamabad had eagerly awaited. Pakistan has backed the Taliban in several international forums. Imran Khan, former Premier of Pakistan, said that the Taliban were "breaking the chains of slavery," demonstrating the Pakistani government's support (Dawn, 2021). Statements made by Pakistani officials and their visits to the recently established Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan all point to the same conclusion: using the Afghan Taliban's support as a tool to suppress Pashtun nationalism.

Support for the Afghan Taliban is essential for Pakistan. Since one of the causes is Afghanistan and Pakistan's proximity, this raises the possibility of strained relations between the two countries, given their ongoing disagreement over the Durand Line. Since Pakistan already has a hostile neighbor to the east, it cannot afford to have a rival neighbor to the west because doing so could endanger Pakistan's security and capacity to survive in the region. Pakistan believes that by supporting the Afghan Taliban, it can accomplish two goals at once: preventing Pashtun nationalism on both sides of the Durand Lines and maintaining a balance against India in Afghanistan. India's role in Afghanistan has been severely underrated by the international community, despite its contribution to aiding Ahmad Masoud's Northern Alliance against the Afghan Taliban from 1996 to 2001. India kept her links to the Northern Alliance after the 9/11 attacks and promoted Hamid Karzai as its candidate for the new government.

Pakistan sought hope in the Afghan Taliban to reduce India's influence in the region because it was unacceptable for a neighbor to be close to the archenemy. After the arrest of Kul Bhushan Jadhav on March 3, 2016, who admitted to harming Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity and his attempts to destabilize Pakistan by inciting separatist movements in Baluchistan and supporting the Baloch Liberation Army. Delhi's ambitions to undermine the security and strategic stability of Pakistan were exposed by Pakistan in front of the world.

India and Afghanistan hands in gloves meant that Pakistan's enemies to the east and west, respectively, with the potential for the two to undermine Pakistan's internal

security and stability by supporting various nationalist groups there. The details and claims stated by Pakistan's DG ISPR, Major General Asif Ghafoor, during a press conference on April 30th, 2019, regarding the PTM being funded by NDS and RAW, two Indian and Afghan intelligence agencies, respectively. Islamabad being wary of Pashtun nationalism has supported the Afghan Taliban to safeguard its strategic and security interests. Furthermore, when Ashraf Ghani wrote on Twitter, "I am troubled by the arrest of Manzoor Pashteen and his colleagues, and I fully support the historic Pashtun Long March in Pakistan." Islamabad and Rawalpindi were on guard after the Ghani regimes subtly endorsed the PTM in a tweet. Moreover, Pakistan believed that due to the old ties with the Afghan Taliban and their lack of interest in any merger or secessionist movement, Afghanistan might drop her claim on the Durand Line.

Although Pakistanis frequently exhibit nationalist inclinations, the only time nationalism has been triumphant in Pakistani history was when East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) gained Independence from West Pakistan. Pakistan cannot bear another nightmare after the "Fall of Dhaka," which occurred on December 16th, is still much remembered. The worry plagues the government and military elite that a successful Pashtun nationalism movement may spark other nationalist uprisings. This explains Pakistan's propensity to support Islamic nationalism and the Afghan Taliban.

Conclusion

The creation of Pakistan is based on the Two Nation Theory. Pakistan has always promoted Islamic nationalism and cannot afford other nationalism. From its inception, Pashtun nationalism has posed threats to Pakistan. In the Banu Declaration, the Pashtun nationalists oppose the creation of Pakistan. Likewise, the Pashtun rulers of Afghanistan, such as Daoud Khan and Zahir Shah, along with the Pakistani Pashtun leaders, had incited Pashtun nationalism against Islamabad from 1947 to 1970s. When Bengali nationalism broke Pakistan into two pieces in 1971, Pakistan became wary of Pashtun nationalism. Pakistan allied with the religious instrumentalists of Pakistan and Afghanistan to replace Pashtun nationalism, a threat to its sovereignty, with Islamic nationalism.

Pakistan had supported the Afghan Taliban in the 1990s to bring them into power because their foremost concern was Islamic nationalism, and they had no links with

Pashtun nationalism. After 9/11, the Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani governments again tried to provoke Pashtun nationalism against Pakistan for their gain. Likewise, with the emergence of PTM, Pashtun nationalism gained more strength, and its leaders directly threatened Pakistan's integrity. Pakistan was well aware of this threat and did not abandon the support of the Taliban. When Taliban 3.0 took over Kabul again in 2021, Pakistan explicitly extended its support to the Afghan Taliban (Islamists) mainly to quash the Pashtun nationalism.

After exploring Pakistan's strategic use of religious instrumentals for tackling Pashtun nationalism, this paper argues that Pakistan is following the traditional way of supporting the Islamists against Pashtun nationalism. The support of the Taliban can hurt Pakistan. On the one hand, TTP is drawing inspiration from the Afghan Taliban and attacking Pakistan's sovereignty. On the other hand, the region is still not peaceful, which is not a good sign for Pakistan because peace in Afghanistan will ensure stability in Pakistan. Therefore, this paper suggests that Pakistan should deal with Pashtun nationalism by taking pragmatic measures, using soft power, and developing a coherent strategy to ensure its internal and external security and stability. For instance, it should fulfill the legal demands of the leading voice (PTM) of Pashtun nationalism and accommodate more Pashtuns in the establishment.

In addition, the policymakers in Islamabad should reconsider the advocacy of the Taliban, an untrusted ally, that can create more problems for Pakistan in the near future and should focus more on the political, social, and economic development of Pashtuns to successfully neutralize the Pashtun nationalism. In this way, the state can ensure its internal and external security from internal and external threats, trying to destabilize Pakistan, without the support of the Afghan Taliban, which can never be trusted because of its strategic use of TTP against Pakistan.

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Correspondence:

Anees Wadud Khan

aneeswadud2917@gmail.com
