



JAN-MAR
2009

Paper
Post-911 Peace Narrative in Pakistan

Paper

Post-911 Peace Narrative in Pakistan

Shabana Fayyaz

The biggest contemporary challenge facing the people and government of Pakistan is the restoration of peace in the country. This paper argues for the cultivation of inclusive, broad-based, objective, and sustainable 'strategic peace' in Pakistan. That can be achieved through a combination of force, dialogue and social and economic development. However, beyond rhetoric, the question remains how to move towards this goal practically? The key element of cultivating and restoring trust within communities both at the state and non-state level needs to be harnessed. Only when trust is restored can the ultimate goal of achieving a national consensus-based counterterrorism policy be realized. The central argument here is that strategic peace requires constructive thinking and the institution of a consensus-based policy at the national and sub-national levels. The critical challenge, thus, is to foster harmony among the various stakeholders within and beyond the country.

To discuss the multifaceted dimensions of peace discourse within Pakistan – a frontline state in the US-led war on terror – it is pertinent to look into the competing arguments for stability and peace at the micro and macro levels across Pakistan. Every new threat brings in new challenges and that, in turn, call for re-examination of the old ways of thinking both at the state and/or non-state levels.

The very occurrence of 9/11 attacks put states like Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan in the spotlight. After Pakistan committed to join as a frontline state the US-led international campaign against terrorism that began with an assault on Afghanistan in November 2001, the gap between the public's perception and Islamabad's interpretation of terrorism widened to the utmost. The result has been an erosion of stability and security at all levels – including political, social, economic, ethnic and individual – across the country. The prospects of a consensus-based peace remain elusive in Pakistan.

Three divergent perspectives have remained key elements of the peace discourse in post 9/11 Pakistan. The first is the government's perspective, reflected in its policies and initiatives regarding the war on terror; then there are the religious and sociopolitical perspectives. Before looking in detail at the three groupings one must understand that there is no watertight compartmentalization among the three. However, for the purpose of analysis, all three are discussed separately.

(a) Government's perspective

The government in Islamabad, whether led by General (r) Pervez Musharraf or by the present Pakistan People's Party-led coalition, has remained committed to ensuring success in the war on terror. A variety of policies and initiatives have been adopted to foster peace at home and beyond. Musharraf was the main architect of Pakistan's post-9/11 foreign and internal policies, and narrated this change in these words:

The tragedy of 9/11 transformed security policies and changed geopolitical calculations. Pakistan took a strategic decision, based on the principles of humanity and our national interest, to support the war on terror.... Pakistan will remain in the forefront.... It is a decisive moment in history. We must decide whether to flow with the currents that threaten confrontation and the collapse of our civilization, or muster the collective will to chart the course of history towards a peaceful and cooperative global society.¹

Since 2001, Pakistan has been pursuing a policy of eliminating the extremist elements either by use of force or political dialogue. It has made peace deals with the militants and has also launched security operations against them. In 2008 alone, Pakistan arrested 4,113 militants² and killed many others, launched 12 major military operations against the Taliban in its territory, killing over 3,000 and arresting more than 2,000 militants including Afghan Taliban.³ In the same year, 3,182 people were killed and another 2,267 injured in operations launched by Pakistani security forces.⁴ Pakistan's security forces have suffered 1,750 casualties⁵ in the course of the war on terror – twice the number of total casualties suffered by coalition forces of 41 nations in Afghanistan. But peace has not yet been restored in the country, particularly in the tribal region bordering Afghanistan and the NWFP. Deep rifts have always been present within the political, religious and even government circles on the issue of the war on terror and the government's policies in this regard. A severe skepticism on part of the people has also emerged parallel to these rifts. The official policy has neither brought peace nor evolved a consensus on the issue. The political/religious leaders and the public have never been taken into confidence either on Pakistan's commitments and obligations in the anti-terror war.

Resultantly, in an environment devoid of trust and consensus, ambiguity has constantly shrouded government initiatives for fighting terrorism and restoring peace in the country. One comes across a multitude of statements – by military chiefs, the diplomatic community, and political leaders – which are not only contradictory but also lack the commitment to resolve the issue. This gap has grown from the Musharraf era to the current PPP regime as Pakistan has traversed the trajectory of the war on terror. The only difference the PPP government has made is its effort to own the war on terror, perhaps to win support of the people who see the campaign as America's war.

After repeated statements by President Aif Zaradri and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani expressing commitment to the war on terror and to initiating a three-pronged strategy to win it, army chief General Kayani has also supported the wider matrix of the war on terror including political engagement, use of force and economic development. To quote Kayani:

The multi-prong approach, fully supported by the people of Pakistan will help us defeat the threat of internal terrorism... Military action alone cannot solve the problem. Political reconciliatory effort is required to go along with the military prong to win hearts and minds of the people... There are no quick fixes in this war.⁶

Reflecting on the Pak-US counter-terror equation, Kayani has repeatedly aired his apprehensions against the coalition forces' cross-border actions inside Pakistan's tribal regions:

Such reckless actions only help the militants and further fuel the militancy in the area. Pakistan Army has given huge sacrifices in this war and it is the presence of the army which has denied the freedom of movement and operation to Al Qaeda and the affiliates. Trust-deficit and misunderstandings can lead to more complications and increase the difficulties for all... To succeed, the coalition would be required to display strategic patience and help the other side the way they want it rather than adopting a unilateral approach which may be counterproductive.⁷

To some extent, these statements also reflect the assessment of intellectuals, media persons, and Pakistani diaspora. However, what is lacking is how to nurture peace and stability in the long run. Unless issues in Afghanistan are settled, that is, the Pashtun majority is given representation, governance is improved and the Afghan economy revived, lasting peace in Pakistan cannot materialize. The way out is to iron out the perception gap between Kabul and Islamabad regarding the challenge terrorism poses. There has to be continued intensive bilateral cooperation, and an engagement based on mutual recognition that terrorism affects both countries. It is pointless to continue trading allegations against one another despite understanding the complexity of terrorism that threatens national cohesion

in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The need to have an integrated notion of peace within and beyond Pakistan was reiterated in the very first official statement of newly-elected president Asif Zardari:

Pakistan intends to work not only with Afghanistan but also for the entire region including other neighbouring countries. We look to the region and shall stand with neighbours. ... Pakistan and Afghanistan have been friends for a long time and they will stand with each other and not in the way of each other for the betterment of the peoples of the two countries. This is a message for not just Afghanistan but for all the neighboring countries.⁸

The need to understand and address the root causes of extremism is also highlighted in the official perspective. The strategy of using force is justified as means to restore the weakened writ of the government in the Tribal Areas.⁹ These areas have long been neglected in all aspects – including economic, social, educational, political and legal – of development and progress.

Despite official arguments in support of an integrated vision of peace at home and abroad, national consensus on the so-called war on terror and Pakistan's role in it has not evolved. In this context, it would be beneficial to look at the two other broad clusters of discourse, the religious and political perspectives on peace and the war on terror.

(b) Religious perspective

The religious spectrum ranges from mild to extreme. The proponents of this discourse can be found at all levels of state and society. The insurgents and hardliners siding with the Afghan Taliban are not in majority. Their groupings are neither centralized in character nor directly controlled by Al Qaeda. A number of groups with sectarian,¹⁰ ethnic,¹¹ and Islamist¹² agendas come together under the banner of *jihad* against the presence of Western forces in Afghanistan and the Pakistani government that is an ally in the war on terror.

Militants facilitating the Taliban, both of Afghan and non-Afghan origin, envision peace in Afghanistan and Pakistan only after the defeat and withdrawal of Western/NATO troops presently fighting along side the Afghan government forces. They also call for pulling back Pakistan's forces currently engaged in counter-insurgency in the Tribal Areas. Militants believe ultimate peace is only possible through an Islamic rule across the region.¹³

However, moderate religious organizations¹⁴ – including charities, madrassas and the civil society – believe that extremists are misusing Islam for their petty agendas. But the fallout is being felt by the people all over the world. Such moderate elements have not been able to come to the forefront and ordinary people continue to fall prey to the extremist version of Islam. This brings us to political perspective on peace in the post-9/11 era.

(c) Political perspective (peace through democracy)

To quote former prime minister of Pakistan, late Benazir Bhutto, "Democracy is necessary to peace and to undermining the forces of terrorism."¹⁵ She asserts that:

The forces of moderation and democracy must, and will, prevail against extremism and dictatorship. I will not be intimidated. I will step out on the tarmac in Karachi not to complete a journey, but to begin one.

The majority of political actors, whether belonging to the left, right or center political parties in Pakistan advocate this line of thinking. Intellectuals and community leaders also echo the same perception of peace. There exists an understanding that the war on terror has pushed Pakistan towards more trouble. The challenge faced by Pakistani leadership is how to steer the country out of the quagmire of terrorism and extremism. To quote Nawaz Sharif, another former premier and leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N):

Now the situation has changed. A truly representative parliament has come into being.... Every decision will be presented before parliament, they will review Musharraf's policy in the last six years.... The US and Pakistan want to see the world free of terrorism and for innocent people not to suffer. We want to see peace in every corner of the world and we want to see peace in Pakistan also. We do not want that in order to give peace to others we turn our own country into a murder house.¹⁶

Conclusion

From a discussion of these multiple strands of peace one can conclude that there exist 'pieces of peace' within Pakistan. There is an urgent need to build bridges among these pieces through sustained dialogue. The idea of "strategic peace" put forth in this paper needs to be explored at all levels. There is a need to understand the gaps within the system and rectify past mistakes.

In a nutshell, strategic peace based on dialogue, understanding and patience should be the ultimate goal of all policymakers within and beyond Pakistan. That is, the concept that peace means more than the absence of overt violent conflict. Strategic peace implies interaction and engagement based on mutual understanding at the micro and macro level. The ultimate goal is to foster sustainable peace across the society based on the broader vision of security. Here, the aim is to institute mechanisms and undertake policies that aim to provide physical and mental security to the people at large. To quote Tibetan leader Dalia Lama:

Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold.... Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free.¹⁷

In short, strategic peace should not be seen as a distant goal but as a means through which sustainable peace is possible.



KNOWLEDGE FOR PEACE

Notes:

-
- ¹ Address to the 58th United Nations General Assembly, 2004. Complete text is available at [//www.un.org](http://www.un.org).
- ² *Pakistan Security Report 2008*, Pak Institute for Peace Studies, Islamabad, p.14.
- ³ <http://www.san-pips.com/new/index>
- ⁴ *Pakistan Security Report 2008*, p.3.
- ⁵ <http://www.san-pips.com/new/index>.
- ⁶ Pakistan Army chief, General Ashfaq Kayani, made these comments following his meeting with senior United States officers on USS Abraham Lincoln on 27th August 2008. Details are available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashfaq_Parvez_Kayani.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ President of Pakistan Asif Zardari made these remarks while addressing a joint press conference with Afghan President Hamid Karzai at the President House in Islamabad on September 10, 2008, after taking oath as the 12th president of Pakistan.
- ⁹ The Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) is divided into seven agencies and six frontier regions. The agencies are: Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, Mohmand, Bajaur, North Waziristan and South Waziristan. Frontier regions (FR): FR Peshawar, FR Kohat, FR Tank, FR Banuu, FR Lakki and FR Dera Ismail Khan. Under the Constitution, FATA is included among the “territories” of Pakistan (Article 1). It is represented in the National Assembly and the Senate but remains under the president’s direct executive authority (Articles 51, 59 and 247). Laws framed by the National Assembly do not apply here unless specifically directed by the president, who is also empowered to issue regulations for the “peace and good government” of the tribal areas. For details visit: <http://www.fata.gov.pk>.
- ¹⁰ The prominent sectarian groups banned in Pakistan in 2002 are the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) – a radical group from the majority Sunni sect – and the Tehreek-e-Jafria Pakistan (TJP) – a movement of followers of the Shia sect. The SSP was founded by Sunni cleric Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi in the 1980s and wants Pakistan to be officially declared a Sunni Muslim state. The TJP was founded in 1979. Its leader, Allama Arif Hussain al-Hussaini was a student of the leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini. Another banned group is the Tanzeem-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi – a radical Sunni Muslims outfit – founded by Maulana Sufi Mohammad.
- ¹¹ The main ethnic groups in Pakistan include [Punjabis](#), [Pashtuns](#), [Sindhis](#), [Seraikis](#), [Muhajirs](#), [Balochis](#), [Hindkowanis](#), [Memon](#), [Chitralis](#).
- ¹² The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), an alliance of six religious political parties, won around 11 percent of the vote in the 2002 general elections.
- ¹³ The most prominent militant group in Pakistan is the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). It has its presence in all seven agencies of FATA as well as settled areas of NWFP, including Swat, Bannu, Tank, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohistan, Buner and Malakand. One of the publicly aired key objectives of the TTP is ‘Enforce Shariah, unite against NATO in Afghanistan, and perform defensive Jihad against Pakistan Army.’ For a detailed account of the TTP see Hassan Abbas, “Profile of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan”, *CTC Sentinel*, Jan. 2008, Vol 1, Issue 2.
- ¹⁴ The *Barelvi* school of thought is a branch of Sunni Muslims. What makes them distinct is their extraordinary love and devotion for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This group was founded by Ahmed Raza Khan Barelvi who wrote many books. In his teachings he has exhorted Muslims that the path to eternal success is to follow the Shariah and the love of God and of the Prophet. *Barelvis* consider Prophet Muhammad as the best human being and the source through which they can achieve the love of God.
- ¹⁵ Quoted at <http://www/quotes and poem.com/quotes/listquotes/author/Benazir-bhutto>.
- ¹⁶ *Dawn*, March 25, 2008.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.dalailama.com/page.2.htm>.

About Institute

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) is an independent, not-for-profit non governmental research and advocacy think-tank. An initiative of leading Pakistani scholars, researchers and journalists, PIPS conducts wide-ranging research and analysis of political, social and religious conflicts that have a direct bearing on both national and international security. The PIPS approach is grounded in field research. Our surveys and policy analyses are informed by the work of a team of researchers, reporters and political analysts located in different areas of conflict in Pakistan. Based on information and assessments from the field, PIPS produces analytical reports, weekly security updates and policy briefings containing practical recommendations targeted at key national and international decision-makers. We also publish survey-based reports and books, providing in-depth analysis of various conflicts or potential conflicts.



Pak Institute for Peace Studies

Post Box No. 2110, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Tel: +92 - 51 - 2291586

Fax: +92 - 51 - 2100651

www.san-pips.com

Email: pips@san-pips.com