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*Political Cost the ANP Paid in Its
Fight against Extremists*

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The policies and plans implemented by the Awami National Party (ANP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during its five year rule there (2008-2012) were based on its manifesto for the 2008 general elections, on the basis of which it had managed to get a clear public mandate.

As it had categorically pronounced in its 2008 election campaign to fight against pervading violent and militant discourses in the province and the wider region, the ANP-led government eventually took a stern stand against the militants and devised a counterterrorism policy to contain the latter's growing social control and terrorist acts. No doubt the militants were not only undermining the indigenous socio-cultural discourse of the land but were also instrumental in destroying human life, property and dignity of almost the whole population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA besides other parts of Pakistan.

The ANP had to confront extremist and terrorist organizations on ideological (discourse), political, military and cultural levels which it did at the risk of its leadership and cadre besides annoying many among national and international strategists.

A review of militants' ideological propaganda literature, which is available in print and electronic forms, suggests that the militant or extremist discourse is intricately woven around the central premise of a homogenized worldview. The discourse presents a world where every object is identical with every other object. It is a world where all living species have the same brain structure, speaking the same language, thinking the same way, having similar social organization and having similar cultural fabric. Hence, it is important for them to eliminate indigenous socio-cultural fabric everywhere in the world on the one hand while on the other hand the militant discourse tries to push back history through the judicious use of the concept of *Khilafat*. Both indigenous wisdom and modern human civilization must be the first victim.

Through the use of this logic, the discourse has brought about shift in religious authority, e.g., 'Jihad' has been decreed to be equal to *Qital*, and it has been propagated as the only way left for struggle, and finally 'Jihad' has been sanctioned as a private enterprise. The concept of *Khilafat* is nested in the concept of Jihad and the concept of Jihad is nested in the concept of *Shahadat*. This triangular construct is coupled with 'otherization' to make it more lethal in waging a war against the whole world.

Nonetheless, those supporting 'Jihad' against Soviets in 1980s had reconstructed the ancient code of *Pakhtunwali* to make it suitable for their vested interests. The concerted efforts by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), ISI, Jamaat-i-Islami, Wahabi madrassas and Pakistani military are believed to have glorified the Pashtuns as a valiant race who could sacrifice everything for the sake of Islam and *Pakhtunwali*, and hence they must fight the Soviets who were the enemies of both Islam and *Pakhtunwali*.

The contours of *Pakhtunwali* have to be reconstructed which will probably lead us to the conclusion that Islam might be a cultural element in *Pakhtunwali*, but Wahabism seems to be entirely disjointed if attached to the code of *Pakhtunwali*. The dynamic code has incorporated almost every step of civilizational march of humanity in the last several decades. Poetry, art,

literature, architecture, music and dance have been inseparable parts of the code that could be retraced over the last several centuries. The dynamic aspect of the code is usually ignored when it is brought under discussion by the academics and media around the globe. On the other hand, the Pashtun society despite having passed through numerous tumultuous experiences has not been able to build on the indigenous values and move forward towards a modern worldview. Both the constructs, the one by the colonial powers and the other by the indigenous people, need to be revisited in the context of the present crisis.

In this context, was it politically and ideologically possible for the ANP to overlook the phenomenon of extremist violence in the heartland of the Pashtun belt?

The ANP's alternative discourse was perhaps not well received by some among the powerful civilian and military establishment of Pakistan, mainly on the basis of two counts. First, an indigenous socio-cultural alternative against the religious orthodoxy might lead to a demand for a secular Pakistan. Secondly, an ANP that dominates the religio-ideological discourse in the province might push for greater regional autonomy.

Noted social scientist Hamza Alavi had said back in 1997: "There is an extra-ordinary sense of insecurity in the minds of our rulers about Pakistan's nationhood... Their fear was particularly great when ethnic movements began to demand regional autonomy. They hoped that an ideological offensive using religion would neat down ethnic movements and put an end to demand of regional autonomy."¹

Some of the recently floated hypotheses and reports in national and international media and also think-tanks confirm few assumptions of this author. First, Taliban in Afghanistan are being constructed as representatives of Pakhtun national movement² so that the US reaches a negotiated settlement with the Taliban in Afghanistan which might pave way for withdrawal of NATO combat forces from Afghanistan. Second, as the military establishment of Pakistan backs a negotiated settlement with the Taliban in Afghanistan with the urge to have a long-lasting influence, favourable political conditions in Pakistan are necessary for the purpose (facilitating PTI and JI in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to come to power) even if genuine representation is denied to the masses. Hence, the genuine socio-cultural movement and indigenous narrative espoused by ANP had to be kept away from power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The ANP during its five year rule in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also supported and worked for political reforms in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which has not been accorded the same priority in terms of the development process being undertaken in other parts of the country. Since the independence of Pakistan, a specific arrangement was imposed upon FATA for a specific reason but the discourse constructed for the purpose was based on the ancient code of Pakhtunwali discussed earlier. Pakistan continued to pursue policies in FATA and beyond that it inherited from British India.

According to many analysts and authors, the “Forward Policy” of the British era was transformed into the “strategic depth policy” in the late 1970s. As Rahim-ul-Haq has put it: “The strategic depth policy became the practical manifestation of strategic interests, understood through the prism of ideological guardianship of Pakistan military. This policy had four components; first, an undefined boundary—retaining the contested Durand Line, second, ensuring a friendly regime in Afghanistan, third, curbing Pashtun separatism and nationalism through Islamism, fourth, ensuring a safe sanctuary for training ideological non-state actors for Pakistan’s regional policy objectives.”³

This time it was to deny political influence to India instead of the Tsar of Russia or the Soviet Union. William Dalrymple of the Brookings Institute has based his whole thesis on the premise that Pakistan’s insecurity of having the probability to be squeezed between the eastern and western neighbours is the main cause of internal insurgency.⁴

Keeping in view this context, in July 2009 the ANP’s central executive committee passed a resolution calling for FATA’s incorporation into the then NWFP; comprehensive reforms to the FCR to void any provisions that contradict the constitution and basic rights; and extension of the Political Party Order (PPO) (2002) to FATA.⁵ On October 25, 2011 ANP’s provincial president, Senator Afrasiab Khattak, published an article in *Dawn* which said: “The whole design of FATA was aimed at keeping the area as a political ‘non-conductor’ like a piece of dry wood that is not a conductor of electricity. One has to accept the fact that this colonial design succeeded to a great extent. FATA became more of a ‘strategic space’ than an area inhabited by people who could aspire to fundamental rights... It goes without saying that socioeconomic and political development is possible only if the government is able to cleanse FATA of terrorism and reconcile the alienated tribesmen. Similarly, one would hope that the government will not wait for another 64 years to usher in the next installment of reform to properly integrate FATA with the Pakistan state system.”⁶

Consequently, the ANP formed a Jirga which met in Peshawar on January 2, 2012. Demanding the merger of FATA within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Jirga said it believed FATA tribesmen could be satisfied with a similar status assigned to Malakand. The Jirga welcomed Afrasiab Khattak’s proposal to award Provincially Administrative Tribal Areas (PATA) status to FATA.⁷

The acceptance of the ANP’s proposal might not only have ended an era of anachronistic law, the Frontier Crimes Regulation of 1901, but would have also ushered in an era of genuine political, legal and administrative mainstreaming of FATA. But the ANP’s proposal was met with severe criticism by the centrist elements and religio-political parties inside and outside FATA. One of the foremost reasons could be that if FATA was mainstreamed, Pakistan would have to revisit its Afghan policy.

The ANP’s efforts to counter militants’ violent discourse and reform FATA had serious political implications for the party in the form of the election results it obtained in 2013. There was a

deliberate media campaign and an intense militants' assault to threaten the party, keep it away from electoral campaign and pave the way for its failure in the elections.

After scanning large media outlets a few months before the elections, one can easily conclude that media was used in the shape of talk shows, propagation of pre-poll surveys and columns in print media to widely disseminate the narrative of 'corruption', 'pro-Americanism' and 'bad-governance' against the ANP. With the exceptions of a few columnists and anchor-persons, most of the columns in print media and most of the anchor persons in electronic media continuously depicted the ANP to be a loser in the elections. The media manipulators knew quite well that workers, voters and sympathizers of the ANP could be de-motivated effectively through the use of this tool. Consistent use of social media was also profusely carried out to discredit the leadership by dubbing them 'corrupt', 'coward' and 'agents'.

As far as terrorist assault and use of violence against the ANP is concerned, a report by Pak Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS) titled "Elections 2013: Violence against Political Parties, Candidates and Voters"⁸ stated that the ANP remained the target of terrorist attacks during the whole duration of the elections campaign not only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also in Karachi and FATA. The militants hit the leaders and workers of the ANP in at least 37 attacks between January 1 and May 15, 2013.

The *New York Times* in its April 20, 2013 issue reported that "Electioneering has taken a dark twist in northwest Pakistan, where a concerted campaign of [Taliban](#) attacks against the main secular party is violently reshaping the democratic landscape before parliamentary elections scheduled for May 11"⁹.

A *BBC* reports on April 5 2013 stated: "Thus far, the militants have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to attack the secular parties, while the security forces have failed to clear them out of their known sanctuaries in the north-west. The ANP party, which led the outgoing administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has been the worst hit. In October 2008, the party's chief, Asfandiyar Wali, narrowly escaped a suicide bomb attack near his residence in Charsadda. Since then, the party's top leaders have limited their movements and have avoided public exposure. A recent report by BBC Urdu said that more than 700 ANP activists have been killed by snipers or suicide bombers during the last four years, including a top party leader, Bashir Bilour. In recent weeks, low-intensity bombs have gone off at several local ANP election meetings, reducing its ability to conduct an open campaign."¹⁰

Express Tribune in its issue of May 10 reported: "ANP was the worst sufferer of terrorist attacks. Bashir Ahmed Bilour, a key ANP leader, was killed in a bomb blast ahead of ANP's election campaign in Peshawar. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) besides issuing a general threat to people asking them to stay away from elections, declared the party 'un-Islamic'. The militants said ANP, MQM and the PPP were secular and vowed to sabotage their campaign."¹¹

An article in *Dawn* on May 10, 2013 stated: "The ANP seemed to be singled out by the TTP in Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, being attacked almost on a daily basis. The

workers, rallies and candidates of ANP have been attacked 25 times since March 2013. Most of these attacks took place in places where the ANP is believed to get a majority or considerable votes, including Bannu, Kohat, Peshawar, Charsadda, Mardan, Swabi and Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pishin in Balochistan and Karachi in Sindh. Judging from the patterns of attacks the TTP wanted to put heavy psychological pressure on the ANP leadership to force it to boycott the elections. Had that happened, the TTP along with other dictatorially minded elements would have succeeded in snatching away the right of representation from a well-established political party in Pakistan.”¹²

The unleashing of terror on the ANP before elections created an environment of fear and isolation among the cadre, voters and sympathizers of the party. The fear factor played havoc with the communicative ability of the cadre while the creation of obscure circumstances left the cadre undecided about crucial issues pertaining to the elections.

Author’s interviews with 500 cadre and non-partisan respondents in Peshawar, Charsadda, Swabi and Swat districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for a research study to be published later revealed that the local ANP chapters used to receive letters of threats almost on daily basis during the three months before elections. Besides, polling agents of not less than 30 polling stations in NA4 Peshawar, NA12 in Swabi, NA 7 Charsadda, NA 1 Peshawar and PK 81 Swat divulged to the author that on the day of polling, the agents had received letters in the morning that the polling stations which had majority Laltain (election symbol of ANP) votes would be destroyed instantly. The same letters were distributed among the voters who had come to poll their votes.¹³

Apart from the threatening letters, a fatwa was seen being circulated in PK 11 and PK 10 Peshawar which had urged the voters to abstain from voting for ANP as it was against Islam.¹⁴

In mysterious ways, the discourse of ‘corruption’, ‘pro-Americanism’, and ‘cowardice’ of the leadership (referring to the absence of leadership) was permeated through the word of mouth from Swat to Bannu, D.I. Khan and Tank. Even in the rural areas where there was no access to electronic media and very little literacy for reading of the print media, like southern districts and northern districts, the non-partisan masses were communicated the message that ANP was ‘anti-Islam’, ‘Pro-American’, ‘Corrupt’, and would never finish load shedding if came to power again.

All these tactics put too heavy a pressure on the ANP candidates to allow them to run the campaign in a meaningful manner. This gave a fatal blow to the ANP campaign keeping in view that the first rank leadership of the party had already been put on virtual house arrest.

The authors observed in four districts and was reported from 10 more districts that the local law-enforcement agencies would force the ANP candidates not to hold any rally or corner meetings due to security reasons. While all types of negative propoganda would continue against the candidates and the party, the ANP cadre was not allowed to run a counter-propaganda campaign. In a few places, the cadre made efforts to use modern technology but lack of resources and consistent demoralization of the cadre made these efforts virtually meaningless.

The fact of the matter is that Pakistani state has yet to create and develop spaces to accommodate indigenous socio-cultural discourses. It is evident from the facts narrated earlier in the report that Pakistan's geo-politics remain to be a determining factor in the political economy of Pakistan. Though continuation of political process has made some space for a pro-people socio-cultural discourse in Pakistan, political power is still dependent on the security contours of Pakistan.

Hence, it is of utmost importance that political movements, which espouse socio-cultural narratives, in Pakistan become more organized, more dynamic and more vigilant. All pro-people political movements in Pakistan, especially the ANP, have to have independent think-tanks consisting of academia to feed the movements with relevant emerging social, cultural, political, strategic and economic realities. Meanwhile, the political leadership including that of the ANP need to become extrovert and progressive; strengthen networking with like-minded movements inside and outside Pakistan; and revitalize its connectivity with emerging national, regional and international realities.

Khadim Hussain is a political analyst based in Peshawar. Views expressed in this article are author's own and may not necessarily represent those of PIPS.

Notes:

¹ Hamza Alvi, “The Territorial Dimension of Pakistani Nationhood,” in *Pakistan: Perspectives on State and Society*, ed. Abbas Rashid (Lahore, SAHE, 2004), 85-102.

² See William Dalrymple, “A deadly triangle—Afghanistan, Pakistan and India,” The Brookings Institute, June 25, 2013, http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2013/deadly-triangle-afghanistan-pakistan-india-d?utm_expid=23328448-5&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com.pk%2F (accessed July 3, 2013)

³ Rahim-ul-Haq, “Strategic Depth: Does It Promote Pakistan's Strategic Interests?” http://academia.edu/978181/_Strategic_Depth_Does_It_Promote_Pakistans_Strategic_Interests, (accessed July 3, 2013).

⁴ William Dalrymple, “The Deadly Triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.”

⁵ International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: Countering militancy in FATA,” Asia Report N°178 –21 October 2009, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/pakistan/178_pakistan_countering_militancy_in_fata.pdf.

⁶ *Dawn*, October 25, 2011, <http://beta.dawn.com/news/668768/reforms-in-fata>.

⁷ *Express Tribune*, January 2, 2012, <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2012/01/02/news/national/merge-fata-into-kp-anp-jirga>.

⁸ PIPS, “Elections 2013: Violence against Political Parties, Candidates and Voters,” <http://san-pips.com> (accessed June 12, 2013).

⁹ *New York Times*, “Taliban Attacks in Northwest Pakistan Are Reshaping Ballot,” April 20, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/22/world/asia/pakistani-taliban-violently-reshape-the-ballot.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed June 12, 2013).

¹⁰ *BBC*, “Pakistan Elections: Taliban Threats Hamper Secular Campaign,” April 5, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22022951> (accessed June 13, 2013).

¹¹ *Express Tribune*, “Elections Campaigns: A free and fair elections?” May 10, 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/546879/election-campaigns-a-free-fair-election> (accessed June 13, 2013).

¹² Khadim Hussain, “A Blood-Soaked Discourse,” *Dawn*, May 10, 2013, <http://dawn.com/2013/05/10/a-blood-soaked-discourse>.

¹³ Copies of the letters are available with this author.

¹⁴ A copy of the fatwa is available with this author.