

THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES' INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN FOR WAZIRISTAN

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Abstract

The tragic event of 9/11 and the subsequent US-led NATO Forces attack on Afghanistan left tremendous impacts on the Pashtun community living across the Pak-Afghan border. Owing to its immediate proximity and porous border with Afghanistan the tribal areas of Pakistan in general, and Waziristan in particular became a sanctuary for Taliban. The ensuing war between the State and non-State actors has scores of impacts on the region such as economic, political and cultural. This paper, however, due to space limitations, only explores some of the major social institutions of Waziristan such as the tribal Maliks (influential tribal chiefs), Jirga system (council of tribal elders), Lashkar (volunteer tribal militia) and Hujra (male community centre) that have been seriously undermined after the US invasion of Afghanistan and its spill-over effects on the region. Unlike most of the contemporary studies, that attribute the current social disruption in Waziristan to the so-called Pashtun's cultural violence or their religiosity, this paper attempts to investigate the problem in quite a new perspective. It argues that the current disruption in the social institutions of Waziristan is due to the alignment between Washington and Islamabad and the pursuit of their respective geopolitical interests in this tribal periphery.

Key Words: US, Pakistan military, militants, Pashtuns, Waziristan, tribal social institutions.

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Introduction

Waziristan constitutes the southwestern tribal periphery of Pakistan with a total area of 11326 square kilometers. It comprises two tribal agencies i.e. North and South Waziristan with a total population of 1217319 persons.¹ The population is predominantly Muslim, with small pockets of Hindu and Sikhs, living in different parts of the region. It is bordered with the Zhob district of Baluchistan in the south and Kurram agency in the north. In the east, it is surrounded by Dera Ismail Khan, Laki Marwat and Bannu districts, while in the west it is bordered by the three provinces of Afghanistan i.e. Paktika, Paktia and Khost. The major *Pashtun* tribes inhabiting the region are: Wazirs, Mehsuds, Dauras Bettani etc.²

The *Pashtun* tribes of this region had their own institutional mechanism such as the tribal chiefs, *jirga*, *lashkar* and *hujra* that evolved over the past several centuries. These institutions regulated the tribal society within the context of *Pakhtunwali* (a *Pashtun* code of life). The role and function of these indigenous institutions, however, gradually changed because of some internal and external factors particularly after the introduction of FCR (Frontier Crimes Regulation) by the British in 1901. Under this regulation the tribal *maliks* were graded according to their power and influences and were paid regular allowances in return for their loyalties to the British government. The traditional *Jirga* was replaced by FCR *Jirga* and its new version was designed so to serve only the imperial interests of the British India.³ The post-colonial Pakistani governments also kept the British policy intact and administered the region through the same archaic regulations.

The *Pashtuns* tribes, living across the Pak-Afghan border, have greater solidarity to each other due to their shared ethnic and cultural background. Any major incursion on the one side of the Durand Line⁴ has had direct impacts on the other side. It became evident during the USSR invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, when millions of Afghan refugees migrated to the Pakistani side of the Durand Line. The seeds of current extremism and social disruption in Waziristan were actually sown during the Afghan war of 1980s, when Pakistani government with the help of Saudi Arab and United States not only established a series of *Madrassas* (religious seminaries) but

¹ *Population Survey*, (2017). Retrieved April 25, 2017, from: [http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/sites/default/files/bwpsr/fata/North & South Waziristan Agencies Blockwis E. Pdf](http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/sites/default/files/bwpsr/fata/North%20&%20South%20Waziristan%20Agencies%20Blockwis%20E.pdf)

² Laiq Shah Derpakhel, *Waziristan*, (Lahore: Al Matbat ul Arabia, 1993), 36

³ Maira hayat, "Still taming the turbulent frontiers? The State in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan". *JASO, N.S.I* (2), (Winter 2009), 182

⁴ It is poorly marked boundary line of 2252 kilometers between the British India (now Pakistan) and Afghanistan. It is named after Sir Mortimer Durand, the then foreign secretary of British India because he had drawn and signed the Durand Line Agreement with Amir of Afghanistan on the behalf of British India.

also provided the local tribesmen with sophisticated weapons like Kalashnikov for the purpose of fighting *Jehad* (holy war) against the Russians troops in Afghanistan.⁵

With the US invasion of Afghanistan thousands of militants including some high profile Al Qaeda leaders crossed the Pak-Afghan border and got shelter in Waziristan. Under the US pressure Pervez Musharraf—the then president of Pakistan—ordered for the deployment of military in Waziristan and the rest of tribal agencies. The tribal indigenous institutions such as *tribal maliks*, *jirga* and *lashkar* were not only sidelined but left on the mercy of the militants. The US induced Pakistan's military operations against the militants and the subsequent peace deals between the two further legitimized the role of non-state actors in Waziristan.⁶ In their struggle for social control and legitimacy, the militants created widespread panic in the region through targeted killings and suicide attacks. They not only targeted the existing social institutions but also introduced a parallel social mechanism of their own. The ensuing war between the state and non-state actors led to a widespread destruction and displacement from the region, thereby undermining the existing social institutions in Waziristan. The paper in hand aims to investigate the ensuing changes in the social institutions of Waziristan and to make a casual relationship of these changes with the US invasion of Afghanistan and its spill-over effects on the region.

Theoretical Framework

Every theoretical framework is a model. If useful it helps explain some of the variance we observe, rarely all of it. In this regard an attempt is made to understand the current social change in Waziristan in the light of Johan Galtung's "Theory of Structural Imperialism". According to Galtung, there always exists a system of exploitation that simultaneously operates at two levels i.e. inter-states and intra-states. At the inter-states level the center states exploit the periphery states, while at the intra-states level both the center of the center and the center of periphery states exploit their respective peripheries.⁷

⁵ Fazlur Rahim Marwat, "The genesis of change and modernization in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan". *IPRI Journal*, 7(2), (2006), 77

⁶ International Crisis Group. "Pakistan's Tribal Areas: Appeasing the Militants". *Asia Report 125* (December 2006) Retrieved March 24, 2017 from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/pakistan-s-tribal-areas-appeasing-militants>

⁷ Johan Galtung, "A Structural theory of imperialism". *Journal of Peace Research*, 8 (2), (1971), 84

Imperialism of this kind, according to Galtung, does not mean simply the subjugation of one nation by another; rather it is the establishment of special type of relationship between the center and periphery elites, which tie them together. The theory postulates that vertical interaction between the core and periphery center proves detrimental for the periphery of the periphery irrespective of the fact whether this relationship between the two centers is based on “harmony of interest” or “disharmony of interest”.⁸

There have been different phases of interaction between Washington and Islamabad, however, the two important phases i.e. (1979-1990) and the post 9/11 phase, are more relevant to Galtung’s theory of Structural Imperialism. During these two phases, the vertical interaction between the two centers left adverse impacts on the periphery of periphery (Waziristan). First, the tribal society was radicalized in the name of *Jihad* (holy war) and later on, the radicalized factions and their followers were declared as terrorists. The post 9/11 phase has proved to be more dangerous for Waziristan in term of social disruption because the already marginalized social institutions of the region almost reached on verge of collapse.

To know the post 9/11 social disruption in the region, different tools were used for data collection that include oral interviews; participant observation; and content analysis of the existing literature on the region in the form of government reports, official files, monograph, books and research articles etc. Using snowball technique, thirty face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with different stakeholders of the area such as the tribal *maliks*, political activists, FATA parliamentarians, journalists, educationists, religious scholars, and tribal youths. In addition, the tool of focus group discussion was also used. Four focus group discussions were held: two each in DI Khan and Bannu with the internally displaced tribal youth and *maliks* respectively. Access to the tribal women was almost impossible due to the rigidly prevailing *Purdah* (veiling) system; however, only two women above the age of 70 years were interviewed at district Karak who were living as IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons).

The paper in hand primarily focuses on the post 9/11 changes in the social institutions of Waziristan, however, a brief history of these institutions is provided so that the level of change becomes more conspicuous. The four major social institutions, central to the present analysis are as follows:

***Tribal Maliks* (influential Tribal chiefs)**

Unlike the settled areas, tribal society had its own mechanism for social control and governance. Tribal *maliks* played significant role in the operation of that mechanism. The basic criterion for becoming a tribal *malik* was *Shamirtya* (manhood) which required a person to offer meal to the

⁸ Ibid. p.97.

visitors and focus on the wellbeing of his tribe. Apart from these, such a person should also be shrewd, should be able to talk effectively in *Jirga* with arguments, and should abide by his commitments. On the demise of a *malik* if his progeny failed to meet standard qualities, some other person from another family of the same sub-tribe would become *malik*.⁹

The traditional way of enlisting the *maliks* underwent changes during the British consolidation of power in India. At the time of selection, the *malik*'s loyalty, his social standing, particularly his ability to get allegiance from the tribesmen was to be seriously taken into consideration.¹⁰ Under the new criterion distinguishing attributes of courage, hospitality and shrewdness required for being *malik* simply vanished and the system of *malikism* locked in those families whose elders could exceed other in allegiance to the British government.¹¹ The British's allowances to the tribal *maliks* in return for controlling their tribes made them a part of the colonial administration instead of the colonized.¹²

In the post colonial period the status and role of tribal *maliks* almost remained the same. In his speech to the tribal *Jirga*, held at Peshawar on April 17, 1948, Jinnah--the then Governor General of Pakistan-- assured the tribal *maliks* that they would be paid regular allowances, as they were receiving in the past, in return for their allegiance to the Pakistani state.¹³ The perks and privileges, they received from the Pakistani governments, further entrench their position in the tribal society. During the USSR invasion of Afghanistan, tribal *maliks* lost some of their powers and prestige to the *mullah* (religious cleric) as a result of the massive radicalization in the region. As observed by Ahmad, "the *mullahs* who once looked to the elders for support were now seen as the guardians of Islam and dominated the political agenda of the agency".¹⁴ However, despite these odds the institution of tribal *maliks* managed to survive. Good or bad, it kept the tribal society intact.

After the US invasion of Afghanistan and the resultant flow of militants into Waziristan, tribal *maliks* emerged as one of the most affected segments of

⁹ Taj Muhammad, *The Pashtuns of Waziristan and the custom based Waziri Law from Shariah perspective*. (Islamabad: Mithaq Interprises, 2005), 359

¹⁰ Ahmad Saleem, *Angrei Raj Aur Paktoon Siyasat (British rule and Pakhtun politics), 1915-1948* (Urdu) (Lahore: Takhleeqat Pakistan, 1997), 93

¹¹ Muhammad, op-cit, p.360.

¹² Hayat, op-cit, p.192.

¹³ "Jinnah's speech to the tribal elders" (April 17, 1948). (NDC file no. 18/CF/48:132). (National Documentation Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan).

¹⁴ A. S. Ahmad, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's war on terror became a global war on tribal Islam*. (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2013), 66

society in term of socio-political marginalization. A local correspondent told the author:

When Taliban first arrived in Waziristan they showered money on the local tribesmen to win over their sympathies. Initially many influential people including some tribal *maliks* started struggle for accommodating foreign militants, particularly the Arabs who were more generous. But soon the militants became too strong to be controlled.¹⁵

Any local person or institution, representing potential threat to the militants, came on their hit list. In a focus group discussion with the tribal *maliks*, they shared that the process of target killing first started from South Waziristan after some of the tribal *maliks* proposed before the military authorities to raise *lashkar* against the militants. Subsequently, a similar practice also started in North Waziristan thereby engulfing the whole tribal regions.¹⁶ The exact number of tribal *maliks*, killed in Waziristan after 9/11, is not known because there is no reliable source in the form of FIR (First investigation report) or any authentic survey conducted in this region. However, during my interviews and focused group discussions with the people of this region it was exposed that most of the influential tribal chiefs were either assassinated or forced to leave the area. Waziristan and Bajaur emerged as the most affected agencies in term of the target killing of the tribal elders.

Pakistan army under the US pressure launched several military operations in Waziristan, which caused widespread destruction and displacement from the region. The most effective way of dealing with the *Pashtuns* tribes was to work within the tribal framework. As noted by Olaf Caro, “If you want to get anything done in dealing with the tribes, work through the tribal organizations; let the tribal leaders produce the good in their own way,”¹⁷ This method, however, was ignored by the Pakistan army stationed in Waziristan. The tribal *maliks* were side lined by the civil-cum military establishment of Pakistan on the occasions of military operations and the subsequent peace deals with the militants.¹⁸ This not only undermined the role of tribal *maliks* but also provided social space and legitimacy to the militants. Rahimullah Yousufzai—a renowned *Pashtun* Journalist and authority on tribal and Afghan affairs—told the author:

¹⁵ Author’s interview with Khalid Khan—an IDP from South Waziristan—Karak: April 23, 2017.

¹⁶ Author’s Focus Group Discussion with the tribal *mailks*, Dera Ismael Khan: July 15, 2017.

¹⁷ Sir Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 398

¹⁸ Farhat Taj, *Taliban and anti – Taliban*. (Tyne UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 88

The peace deals between Pakistan army and the militants developed a psychological pressure on the local tribesmen as they saw that the all powerful Pakistan army surrendered before a few thousands militants. It broke the traditional power configuration in Waziristan and reshaped the tribal society around the non state actors.¹⁹

Disappointed by the ambiguous policy of Pakistan's army, stationed in Waziristan, most of the tribal *maliks* either left Waziristan for settled areas or went into complete hibernation. Fareedullah Wazir during an interview at Islamabad informed the author:

There might have been some individual cases of opportunistic hibernation on the part of *maliks* in the past, however, such holistic serenity of the tribal *maliks* on any national issue in Waziristan was the first ever event of this kind observed only after 9/11. Assassination of the tribal elders, if any, in the past would happen in the last resort, the militants opted for the last option at the first step.²⁰

With the changing circumstances, the political outlook of the tribal *maliks* also changed. Previously, *maliks* have been stern supporters of the status-quo by resisting any idea of politico-administrative reforms in the region. After losing their previous stakes, a significant part of the tribal *maliks* radically changed their stance, from previously opposing the political reforms to the one demanding provincial status and integration with the Pakistani state.²¹

The militants' onslaught on tribal *maliks* was the most important of all their strategic attacks, aimed to create a region more vulnerable to the militant influences. The new strategy had dual strategic advantages for the militants. Firstly, the assassination of tribal *maliks* created power vacuum in the region, which was soon filled by the militants. Pakistani government neither supported the *maliks* against the militants nor filled that vacuum by introducing modern state apparatus, thereby leaving the space opened for the militants. Secondly, the brutal killings of tribal *maliks* by militants developed psychological pressure on the tribal population. During a Focus

¹⁹ Author's interview with Rahimullah Yousafzai--a renowned *Pashtun* journalist and authority on FATA and Afghan affairs, Peshawar: January 9, 2017.

²⁰ Author's interview with Faridullah Wazir (producer radio Pakistan Miranshah) Islamabad: August 4, 2017.

²¹ Sikandar Ahmad Shah, *International law and Drone strikes in Pakistan: The legal and socio- Political aspects*, (London: Rutledge, 2015), 206

Group Discussion one of my respondents told: “If tribal *maliks* could not withstand the militants how it could be expected of a lay man to do so”.²² Hence the tribal *maliks* were the integral part of the tribal society, therefore, the fall of this institution had direct impacts on the rest of tribal institutions.

***Jirga* (council of elders)**

Jirga has served to be the most important dispute resolution mechanism in the *Pashtun* tribal society. It was a group of elders usually comprised of two or more persons depending upon the issue at hand, to discuss and decide an issue, which might range from a minor interpersonal issue to the bloody inter-tribal feuds²³. The members of the *jirga* were required to have important characteristics such as social stature, proximity to the issue at hand and the confidence of the conflicting parties in them.²⁴ Disputes were mostly resolved according to the *Riwaj* (tribal customary law) but sometimes reference would also be made to the Islamic law depending upon the wishes of the conflicting parties. Except rare cases, the decisions of *jirga* were to be peacefully implemented. Its social legitimacy was so high, that people must abide by its rulings or risk expulsion from the community.²⁵

Like the tribal *maliks*, the institution of *Jirga* also underwent structural changes during the British rule. An additional kind of *jirga* known as “FCR *jirga*” was introduced which was different from the traditional *jirga* in term of its composition and function.²⁶ Its members were to be selected by the political agent based on their loyalty and if the latter was not satisfied with their decision, he could order the case for further investigation or refer it to another *jirga*. Moreover, the decisions of FCR *jirga* were not binding; rather they had the status of recommendations and the actual power of conviction or acquittal still rested with the political agent.

The post-colonial Pakistani government also retained FCR *jirga* along with the traditional *jirga* whose functions were confined to the inter-personal issues or in some cases to the inter-tribal disputes. According to a local *malik*, the performance of traditional *jirga* also changed with the passage of time. The dispensation of justice became costly and sluggish. The members of *jirga* would demand feasts and pocket money from the disputing parties.²⁷

²² Author’s interview with Halil ur Rehman (Principal GHS Miranshah) Miranshah: October 6, 2017.

²³ Shah Sawar Khan Mama Khel Marwat, *Jirga* (Pashtu), (Laki Marwat: Danidh Kutabkhana, 2008), 34

²⁴ Dr. Sher Zuman Taizi, “*Jirga System in Tribal Life*” (Peshawar: Area Study Center University of Peshawar 2007). Retrieved April 13, 2017, From: <http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF->

²⁵ Ghulam Qadir Khan Daur, *Cheegha: The call from Waziristan the last outpost*. (Sweden: I-Aleph, 2014), 141

²⁶ James W. Spain, *The Pathan borderland*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1963), 145

²⁷ Author’s interview with Malik Saadi Khan, Wana: April 13, 2017.

Good or bad, *Jirga* remained the only institution for dispute resolution in the tribal society.

The US invasion of Afghanistan and the resultant flow of militants into Waziristan have had direct impacts on the institution of *jirga*. Being a potent institution, *jirga* was viewed by the militants as threat to their independent activities in the region. The activities of *jirga*'s members were strictly watched over by the militants. A local elder informed the author that in the beginning Taliban tried to discourage the *Jirga*'s members through sending intimidation letters. When it did not work, they started suicide attacks on *jirga*'s meetings, convened for the purpose of countering militancy.²⁸

Attacks on *jirga*'s members were not confined only to Waziristan; it engulfed the whole tribal region. At Darra Adam Khel a *jirga* meeting was attacked by a bomber, which claimed 40 lives, beside the other 50 that got serious injuries.²⁹ These attacks have long-term impacts on the institution of *jirga* in Waziristan. Firstly, it reduced the number of *jirga*'s meetings, particularly the large *jirga*'s meetings that usually dealt the inter-tribal issues. Mehboob Khan, a Baka Khel Wazir informed the author:

Unlike the past, *jirga*'s meetings in the open areas are no more possible. Fearing the militants' attacks and the US drone strikes, these meetings, if any, are held in private without getting any publicity. The number of participants is much smaller as compared to the earlier practices.³⁰

The small numbers of *jirgas* that seldom hold its meetings in Waziristan also dealt with only those issues having nothing to do with militancy. Owing to the rampant fear of militants' attacks, the issue of militancy has become exclusively out of the *jirga*'s jurisdiction. Leaving such important sphere like militancy to the Pakistan military is like the virtual collapse of the *jirga*. Secondly, these attacks on *jirga* meetings have also changed the perceptions of local people regarding this institution. The ability of *jirga* to serve as an effective dispute resolution mechanism has been questioned by the local people. A graduate student from Miranshah told the author, "If it (*jirga*) cannot protect itself, how it would be able to protect us from the militants'

²⁸ Author's interview with Moeet khan (a local elder) Mir Ali: May 5, 2017.

²⁹ Daud Khattak, "Suicide bomber attacks Darra elders, kills 40", *The Daily Times*, (March 3, 2008). Retrieved August 21, 2017, From: <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008%5C035C03%5Cstory-3-3-2008> – pg1-1.

³⁰ Author's interview with Mehboob Khan Wazir (Assistant professor Government Degree College Mamesh khel), Bannu: October 9, 2016.

assault or represent our interest in rightful manner”.³¹ Another correspondent complained that as far as American troops are there in Afghanistan, this region (Waziristan) and its people will be used for proxy wars by the Pakistani state centre. He further added that in such a state of proxy war the tribal people cannot expect *jirga* to deliver justice.³²

The militants’ policy of force and suppression did half of the work i.e. insulating the tribal people from the institution of *jirga*, and the rest of half was done by introducing their own mechanism of justice i.e. Taliban *Shura* (consultative council). The new mechanism was branded under the banner of “Islamic justice” and people were attracted and in some cases forced to seek justice out of it. The emergence of *Taliban’ shura* proved a serious blow to the institution of *jirga*, which was already in the dilapidated position. *Shura* started function as a parallel institution providing justice to the people with its own mechanism. Saidullah Jan, a tribesman from South Waziristan said:

At the start, Taliban raised the motto of Islamic justice. They would invite disputing parties to their office and decide disputes without demanding any feast or pocket money. But later on some of the local members of *shura* influenced its decisions in favor of their own kiths and kin.³³

The members of Taliban *shura* were mostly young men having no classic experience of the *Pashtun* traditions. They did not care for local traditions and decided cases in their own manner with the label of Islamic justice. Moreover, they were neither the representatives of the tribal people by lineage nor by election. A tribal elder from South Waziristan told the author:

The members of *Taliban’s shura* were neither trained in Islamic *shariah* nor in *Pashtunwali*, a *Pashtun* code of life. They were mostly young men between the age of 20 to 30 with a poor reputation in the past. Their services were hired by the foreign militants and the latter had no concern with their previous record....How could one expect justice from a person who himself had been a professional thief and dacoit in the past.³⁴

³¹ Author’s interview with Baitullah Wazir (Graduate student Government degree college Miranshah), Miranshah: August 9, 2016.

³² Author’s interview with Nazir Gul Dawar– an IDP (Internally Displaced Person--from North Waziristan, Bannu: November 13, 2016.

³³ Author’s interview with Saidullah Jan --an IDP (Internally Displaced Person--from South Waziristan, DI Khan: October 7, 2017.

³⁴ Author’s interview with Safar, Gul Mehsud (Tribal elder from South Waziristan) Tank: August 21, 2017.

The aforementioned view clearly reflects that *Taliban's shura* was not a representative body; its members were selected by the militants' commander with a clear aim to uphold the militant version of *Sharia* law. Moreover, the laws of *Sharia* invoked by the members of *shura* were incompatible with the basic components of *Pashtunwali* within which *jirga* operated.³⁵

The role of *jirga* in Waziristan has also been undermined by the growing involvement of Pakistan army in the region. *Jirga* of any significant size cannot take place in Waziristan without at least the implicit approval of Pakistan army, and its ruling is implemented only if they correspond to the army doctrine.³⁶ In the given circumstances, the institution of *jirga* can no longer enjoy the power to execute its decisions through raising the traditional tribal *lashkar*.

***Lashkar* (volunteer militia)**

The term *Lashkar* denotes troops.³⁷ Some western authors have referred to it as "raiding party" and "militia".³⁸ In tribal context *Lashkar* has been a group of armed tribesmen arranged on temporary basis usually for the implementation of a *jirga's* decision. It can be raised against the individual or the tribe defying the *jirga's* decision. But some time it is put up against another tribe or clan in case of dispute over land, mountains or water and is used as an instrument to take possession from another tribe.³⁹ Once *Lashkar* is formed, it usually remains operative for few hours or days but in extreme cases, it can be extended up to weeks or a month. Its members diffuse only on the call of *jirga* after the objectives have been successfully achieved or any patch up concluded between the tribes.

Apart from its traditional role, the institution of *lashkar* has been employed by the Pakistani state as a volunteer force during its wars against India. A great number of volunteer tribesmen from Waziristan were mobilized and made them fight along the regular Pakistani army against the Indian troops during the war of 1948 and 1965.⁴⁰ Similarly, during the ongoing war on

³⁵ Farhat Taj (b), "*Compatibility: The Pakhtun culture, Talibanization and obscurity*". Retrieved 14 May, 2016, from: <http://www.pakhtunkhwapeaceforum.blogspot.com/pakhtun-Culture-and-talibanization.html>.

³⁶ Taj, (a), Op-cit, p.68.

³⁷ Rashid Waziri, "Tribal Belt or Blood Theater". *Journal of Regional Studies Center of Afghanistan*. No 12, (2009), 36

³⁸C. Christine, Fair & Peter Chalk , *Fortifying Pakistan: the Role of US Internal Security Assistance*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006), 74

³⁹Ali Gohar, *Who learns from whom? Pukhtun traditions in modern perspective*, (Peshawar: Abasin Printing Services, 2010), 70

⁴⁰ Darpakhel, Op-cit, p.356. Also see Daur, Op-cit, pp.29-33.

terror the institution of *lashkar* was again employed by the Pakistani state as a second line of defense against the militants.

The central government of Pakistan, particularly the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa inspired the local authorities to form *lashkars* in different parts of the tribal areas. The organizers of *Aman Lashkars* known as “peace committees” were even issued appreciation letters by the government of *Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa*, commending their efforts for the maintenance of peace in the region.⁴¹ The members of *lashkar* were promised, by the government authorities, to be provided with all sorts of material and monetary support against the militants. Accordingly, *Aman Lashkars* were formed in tribal agencies such as Khyber, Mohmand and Bajawar where people’s involvement in the counter militancy campaign was fairly well. In North and South Waziristan no such step succeeded as there was strong presence of militants’ network. In Khyber agency violent incidents took place between the members of *Aman Lashkar* and the militants, in which dozen of the local volunteers lost their lives. This was followed by similar incidents in Mohmand and Bajaur agencies where the members of peace committees were brutally killed by the militants. Akhunzada Chattan—a parliamentarian from Bajaur—told the author that the members of peace committees performed their duties with great enthusiasm but they were deserted by the governments which dampened their spirits⁴².

This view is also supported by Farhat Taj who notes, “The lack of government support to the *lashkar*, and in some cases the former collusion with the militants has been a major source of people dissuasion from this institution”.⁴³

The militants’ strategy of target killing has instilled a widespread terror in the mind of the common people who are now increasingly averse to the idea of joining the tribal *lashkars*. Except *Bajaur* agency where *lashkar* performance was fairly well, it has failed to perform the same in the rest of the agencies.⁴⁴ The case of Waziristan has been the worst among all the tribal agencies in this regard. Due to its vital geo-strategic location, militants have demonstrated “zero tolerance” to the formation of *lashkar* in Waziristan. Any person simply proposing the idea of *lashkar* formation against the militant would be their next target. An IDP from Mir Ali informed the author:

⁴¹ Taj (a), op-cit, p. 38.

⁴² Author’s interview with Akhunzada Chattan—a parliamentarian from Bajawar Agency—Peshawar: April 19, 2017.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 88.

⁴⁴ Abdul Shakoor, *Pakhtun and the war on terror: A cultural perspective* (Unpublished Ph D thesis) (Peshawar: Department of IR, University of Peshawar, 2012), 226

We convened a tribal *jirga* in mid 2008 in order to form *Aman Lashkar* (peace committee) to bring peace in the region. The *jirga* comprised local tribesmen and *maliks*. The issue under consideration was to raise a tribal *lashkar* to counteract militancy. A suicide attack took place on *jirga* resulting into a number of casualties including an election candidate Itwar Ali. The *Aman Lshkar* survived only for fifteen days and was soon abolished thereafter.⁴⁵

The idea of state sponsored *Aman Lashkar* that was tried by the Pakistan army in North Waziristan in 2008, also failed due to the prevailing uncertainty in the region. The previous treatment done to the members of peace committees in different tribal agencies have made the people of Waziristan highly suspicious of the Pakistan army role. Like the rest of social institutions the failure of *Lashkar* in Waziristan too was due to the competing interests between the US and Pakistan army in the region. The dual game played by some segments of Pakistan army in the region has made them reluctant to join the tribal *lashkar*.

The fall of the aforementioned three major institutions had direct impacts on *hujra*, which served as a pedestal for the organization and management of these institutions.

***Hujra* (Village Community Center)**

Hujra is an Arabic word, which means room or cell.⁴⁶ In the tribal areas of Pakistan mostly inhabited by *Pashtuns* population, every *khel* had its own *hujra*— the *khel* community center— with a marked boundary but no wall around it, indicating the free access of every one to it.⁴⁷

Hujra in tribal areas has been a yardstick through which the integrity and social standing of the families in *khel* (clan) could be measured. A well-stocked and well-maintained *hujra* has always been a sign of integrity among the families, indicating that the elders are in control of the community issues. An ill-maintained *hujra* would, conversely, show the elders' weak control over the families and the lack of commitment on the part of the family members to shoulder responsibilities or care for the family name.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Author's interview with Karim Khan Daur (an IDP from Mir Ali), Karak: July 7, 2017.

⁴⁶ Mamoona Khan Khattak, et al, "Impact Analysis of Rural to Urban Migration on Hujra System of Pashtun Society", *The Dialogue* vol x No.1, 2015, p.81.

⁴⁷ M. Azam Baig, *Pakhtunkhwa Today*. (Peshawar: Dunya Pvt. Limited, 2009), 80

⁴⁸ Daur, op-cit,p.62.

Hujra has been an integral part of *Pashtun* culture where all kinds of social activities ranging from wedding ceremonies to the funeral process and condolence would take place. Beyond a forum of entertainment, *hujra* has been a place of character building. Being the first training school it served as a conduit to pass on the elderly traits of the forefathers into the tribal youths; wherein the latter would learn how to greet people, offer them hospitality, make them comfortable and to finally see them off.⁴⁹

The institution of *hujra* has been central to the communal life of the tribal society. Being a symbol of unity, it successfully managed to fuse different families into *khels*, and *khels* into tribe. It provided social spaces where different issues concerning the communal life were brought on the table, discussed, debated and brainstormed. Above all, this institution served as a public forum for the organization of other institutions like *jirga*, *lashkar*, *cheegha* etc.⁵⁰

Like the rest of social institutions, *hujra* has been through different historical stages. In the FCR (Frontier Crimes Regulation), it was devised that no *hujra* will be constructed without the prior permission of the political agent, a representative of the central government. Restriction on *hujra* can be best reflected from article 33 of the FCR (1901) which states:

No building of the kind commonly known as "hujra" or "chawk" and no building intended to be used as a "hujra" or "chawk" shall be erected or built, and no existing building not now used as a "hujra" or "chawk", shall at any time be used as such, without the previous sanction in writing of the Deputy Commissioner. Whoever contravenes the provisions of Sub-section shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to six months or with fine, or with both.⁵¹

Despite these restrictions, the institution of *hujra* remained intact in traditional manner. During the 1960s and 1970s a significant number of youngsters from Waziristan migrated to Arab countries for overseas employments. Because of foreign remittances some well off families in Waziristan made separate arrangement of *hujra* for themselves in the form of *bettak/ Chowk* (local names used for *hujra*) attached to their houses.⁵² The new trend of individual *bettaks*, though, was not a common phenomenon all over Waziristan; it had significant impacts on the community *hujra*. After the USSR invasion of Afghanistan the dynamics of *Pashtun* tribal society underwent changes. *Hujra* and the attached

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp.62-63.

⁵⁰ Sultan i Rome, "Pukhtu: The Pukhtun code of life". Retrieved May 24, 2016. From: <http://www.mitpressjournals.Org/doi/pdf/10.1162/isec.2009.33.3.180>

⁵¹ For detail see article 33 of *The Frontier Crime Regulation* (FCR), 1901.

⁵² Khattak, op-cit, p.80.

stakeholders i.e. tribal *maliks* were sidelined as they could no more serve the imperial designs of both Washington and Islamabad. A score of *Madrassas* (religious schools) and *Jumaat* (mosques) were constructed in the tribal areas with the help of Saudi and American aid, which became the centers of religious mobilization.

With the US invasion of Afghanistan situation in Waziristan became unmanageable and the institution of *hujra* underwent drastic changes with respect to its previous role in the tribal society. In a focus group discussion with the tribal students at Bannu one of my respondents told that any significant activity taking place in *hujra* is strictly watched over by the Pakistan army. He also shared that they cannot provide *Melmastya* (hospitality) to their guests according to the tribal traditions. He further complained that tribal people cannot offer *Panah* (asylum) to the wayfarers because of the omnipresent fear of militants and Pakistan army. They have no means to protect their guests as they are fully disarmed by the Pakistani government. Another respondent referred to the point that when two or more persons get together, they have to give the reason for their being together.⁵³ I also observed this change during my field work. For each night during my stay at Mir Ali (North Waziristan), I was told by my host (friend) to change the place.⁵⁴

Being a public institution the institution of *hujra* was also affected by the vast scale displacements from Waziristan as a result of the Pakistan military operations. In South Waziristan displacement took place mostly in the areas inhabiting by Mehsud and Burqi tribes. Ahmadzai Wazirs, living in Wana and its suburbs were largely unmoved by the military operations. Similarly, in North Waziristan the areas inhabiting by Uthmanzai wazirs and Daur tribes were mostly evacuated as a result of operation Zarb-e-Azab, launched by the Pakistan's military in 2014. For the internally displaced persons there was no such arrangement of *hujras* in the IDPs camps and rural communities, they were living in. The detachment of IDPs from *hujra* for a period of more than a decade has changed their attitudes and perceptions regarding this institution and the attached cultural values. A Mehsud tribesman told the author:

Being an immovable institution, *hujra* could not be carried with by the IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) to their host communities. Neither the IDPs camps nor the host communities (they are living in) have any provision of community center for

⁵³ Author Focus Group Discussion with the tribal students, Bannu: September 4, 2017.

⁵⁴ Author Field Note, August, 2017.

the displaced persons. The new generation of IDPs is becoming totally stranger to the very concept of *hujra*.⁵⁵

Although, physically *hujra* still exists in Waziristan, it has lost its previous role. The fearing environment is so pervasive that people prefer to stay inside their homes. Gathering of people in *hujra* and gossiping till late night are out dated traditions. It may risk their lives, either by the militant's attack or drone strike which is a common phenomenon in Waziristan. The previous role of *hujra* as a community center as well as a platform for the different socio-cultural activities to is no longer there.⁵⁶

Conclusion

In view of the above findings it can be concluded that social institutions in Waziristan have been undermined in unprecedented manner during the ongoing war on terror in this region. The militant's policy of targeted killing in Waziristan not only led to the hibernation of the tribal maliks but it has also affected the performance of the rest of social institutions like *jirga*, *laskar* and *hujra*. The US induced Pakistan's military operations against the militants and the subsequent peace deals between the two further entrenched the role of non-state actors in the region, thereby undermining the local institutions. Ignoring the tribal dynamics of war, both Washington and Islamabad opted for the policy of force and suppression which led to unprecedented social disruption and chaos in the region. Despite the heavy presence of Pakistan army in Waziristan no safeguard was provided to these indigenous institutions and in most cases they were pitched against the militants.

In the above analysis it was found that the current disruption in the social institutions of Waziristan was mainly due to the Washington-Islamabad alignment in the post 9/11 era and the pursuit of their respective geopolitical interest in this region which later on came to surface in the form of good and bad Taliban.

The indigenous institutions and the attached cultural values that spoiled during the ongoing war in the region have very little prospects to be revived yet again. In the given circumstances, a more sustainable social change is required in the region. For this, Pakistani government should focus to understand the dynamics of social change and to make it more valuable for the people of this tribal periphery as suggested by Galtung.

⁵⁵ Author's interview with Arbaz Khan Mehsud—Social activist from South Waziristan—D I Khan: September 7, 2017.

⁵⁶ Daur, Op-cit, p.256 .

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