Pakistan and the War on Terrorism: Impact on Regional Security

Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari

Introduction

The tragic incidents of 9/11 has drastically altered the international security environment thereby transforming the world perceptions, and forcing nations to view their interests afresh and to own up to their vulnerabilities. It rocked the global alliances and shook the existing power relationships. It also impacted upon the foreign policy perceptions of various countries, especially the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia and Far East, which have become the main battlegrounds for the fight against terrorism.

Pakistan is one of the countries, which felt the major impact of this crisis owing to its geo-strategic positioning, being located on the juncture of the three volatile regions. Since al-Qaeda was accused of being behind the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the US and were operating from the then Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, Pakistan had to make major changes to its foreign policy. This was tantamount to reversing its two-decade long policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan in order to accommodate the demands of international community based on the UN Security Council Resolutions.

Pakistan’s Role in the “War on Terrorism”

The terrorist incidents of 9/11, while generating grief and anger and calls of revenge in the US and the
international community, also created immense pressure on the policy-makers in Pakistan. While *al-Qaeda* was blamed for the attacks, the demand of the international community made to the Taliban regime ruling Afghanistan was to hand over the *al-Qaeda* terrorists to the US for trial, and to shut down the terrorist network being run in the country. Pakistan joined the US-led coalition for three reasons:

1. That Pakistan was constrained to support the US-led War on Terrorism against *al-Qaeda* and Taliban due to the choice given to Pakistan by the US President, George Bush, who in his address to a joint session of Congress and the American people on September 20, 2001, stated: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”\(^1\) He asked every nation to join the US in its war on terrorism. Hence, Pakistan was to choose between cooperation with the US or defiance to the US demands. Saying “NO” was a sure recipe for self-destruction.

2. That Pakistan’s arch enemy, India, was trying to take advantage of the situation by offering unconditional support to the US that included the use of its military bases, logistic support and intelligence sharing. The US had asked the same sort of support from Pakistan, which the Indians were willing to extend unconditionally. Therefore, the Indian factor figured prominently in Pakistan’s decision to support the US in its military campaign in Afghanistan. Since, India did not have any direct land-link with Afghanistan; therefore, Pakistan’s support had become more crucial for the US in comparison with what India had offered. Pakistan had over a two decade long experience of dealing with the Afghans, besides having experience of multifaceted cooperation with the US on Afghanistan,
Pakistan and the War on Terrorism: Impact on Regional Security

during the former Soviet Union's occupation of that country.

3. That it would help Pakistan instantly addressing the problems relating to the negative image created due to its support to the Taliban of Afghanistan since 1994; corruption of the political elites; bad economic conditions; nuclear explosions in 1998; alleged support to the Kashmiri freedom struggle; the Kargil conflict; and a military coup against a democratically-elected government in 1999 and so forth. Full cooperation by Pakistan will, in turn, help Pakistan stage a comeback in the world community.

Initially, Pakistan earnestly strived to convince the Taliban leadership to hand over Osama-bin-Laden and his affiliates to the US or to any other neutral country to stand trial for their alleged involvement in the 9/11 terrorist incidents. In this connection, Chief of the Pakistani Intelligence Agency, (ISI), Lt. General Mahmood Ahmed, traveled to Kandahar and met the Taliban leadership. Failing to convince them, Pakistan was left with no choice, but to cut its ties with the Taliban, and withdraw its recognition of the Taliban regime. President Musharraf, while elaborating on the difficult situation, said that according to Islamic Shariah, if there are two difficulties at a time and a selection has to be made, it is better to opt for the lesser one.

While stating the reasons for siding with the US in its war on Afghanistan, President Musharraf said in a speech he delivered on September 19, "The decision we take today can have far reaching and wide-ranging consequences ... If we take a wrong decision in this crisis, it can lead to the worst consequences. On the other hand, if we take a right decision, the results will be very good. The negative
consequences can endanger Pakistan's integrity and solidarity. Our critical concerns can come under threat ... means our strategic assets and the cause of Kashmir ... On the other hand, we can reemerge politically as a responsible and a dignified nation and all our difficulties can be minimized."³ In his address, President Musharraf pointed out Pakistan's four critical priority areas that needed to be preserved: 1) Security of the country, 2) Economy and its revival, 3) Strategic nuclear and missile assets, and 4) Kashmir cause.⁴

**Pakistan-US Cooperation in the "War on Terrorism"**

It must be stated that Pakistan itself has remained a victim of terrorism since the former Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, when it has been fighting terrorism of various kinds perpetrated against it from various quarters, like KHAD, RAW and KGB. Its spillover into Pakistan was in the shape of sectarian violence (involving Saudi Arabia and Iran). Side by side, Pakistan also faced the onslaught of acts of cross-border terrorism from India, due to Pakistan's principled support to the Kashmir cause.

Following the tragic events of 9/11, Pakistan offered "unstinted cooperation in the fight against terrorism", due to which the international coalition was able to win the war against the Taliban by overthrowing them, and disrupting al-Qaeda's terrorist network in the country. Pakistan's "pivotal role" in the war against terrorism has been acknowledged across the world. According to the US Department of State and Defence, "Pakistan has afforded the US unprecedented levels of cooperation by allowing the US military to use bases within the country, helping to identify and detain extremists, and deploying tens of thousands of its own security forces to secure the Pakistan-Afghanistan border."⁵ According to General Abizaid,
Commander of the US Central Command, "Pakistan has done more for the US in the direct fight against al-Qaeda than any other country." So far, Pakistan has captured more than 600 alleged terrorists and their supporters, and has transferred more than 400 of these to US custody, including several top suspected al-Qaeda leaders, like Abu Zubaydah (March 2002) believed to be al-Qaeda's field commander; Ramzi bin al-Shibah (September 2002) said to be a key figure in the planning of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the US; Khalid Sheikh Mohammad (March 2003) alleged mastermind of the September 2001 attacks; Masrab Arochi (June 2004) a nephew of Khalid Sheikh and convicted in the 1993 bombing of WTC; Mohammad Naeem Noor (July 2004) al-Qaeda computer expert; and a Tanzanian national, Ghailani (August 2004), who was also indicted in connection with bombing of two US embassies in East Africa. Apart from this, Pakistan has also been ranked third in the world in seizing terrorists' financial assets.

Immediately after the 9/11, the US sought Pakistan's cooperation in three areas: intelligence and information exchange; provision of air space; and logistic support. Consequently, Pakistan provided basing and over-flight permission for all the US and coalition forces. Pakistan also spent a large portion of its logistic reserves to support the coalition, which was a very significant contribution, given Pakistan's economic difficulties and its own requirements for self-defence. Moreover, Inter-services Intelligence (ISI) has helped in various phases of operations. Pakistan also deployed nearly 70,000 of its forces on the Pak-Afghan border in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The latter was the first ever deployment of its kind in the history of Pakistan, and came at a time, when relations with India were deteriorating very fast. This commitment continued despite the massing of half a million troops by India on the LOC and the international border in the wake of December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament. Another
aspect of cooperation included formation of a Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism and Law Enforcement; Revival of Defence Cooperation Group (DCG); and Revival of the Joint US-Pakistan Military Exercises etc.

Pakistan’s decision to fight terrorism was a principled one, and it earnestly strived to eradicate this menace. Due to this, Pakistan was faced with numerous difficulties both domestically and internationally. However, there is a general feeling in Pakistan that it has not received substantial reward for the sacrifices it made to help towards the war efforts. The political, economic and military fallout of this war has not been compensated justly, compared to what the US has offered to India, like the “Strategic Partnership”, and provision of sophisticated nuclear and space technology as well as cooperation in the field of defence research and development (R&D). The US support to India in military terms continues to widen the imbalance existing in South Asian region, particularly between India and Pakistan.

**Implications of the War on Terrorism on Pakistan’s Interests**

**Kashmir**

The most important and critical task for Pakistan in the post 9/11 period was to preserve the legitimacy of the Kashmiri freedom struggle, and not to allow it to fall prey to the new definition of terrorism coming out mainly from the West. In the pre-9/11 period, the use of political violence has been an accepted practice under the UN conventions for the people struggling under an alien occupation, against racism and for the right of self-determination. The Kashmiri peoples’ struggle for their right of self-determination against the occupation forces of India certainly fall into one of these categories. Ironically, under the heavy influence of Indian
propaganda and the new rules set by the US that “no cause justifies violence” the international community tends to view the Kashmiri struggle in the context of terrorism. However, the struggle by the Kashmiri people for the right of self-determination itself has not lost its legitimacy and the settlement of the Kashmir dispute is acknowledged by international community as an unresolved political issue between India and Pakistan, to which the people of Kashmir are a party.\textsuperscript{9}

The Indian-engineered incidents of October 1, and December 13, 2001, which led to India’s unprecedented build-up of forces along the LoC as well as the Indo-Pak International border with a counter-response in kind by Pakistan created tremendous tensions. It is also to be noted that the Indian military build-up took place despite the fact that Pakistan condemned those acts of terrorism, and offered joint investigations.\textsuperscript{10} Furthermore, in an effort to raise the ante, Indian leadership started publicly talking of preemptive strikes alleged terrorist camps on the Pakistani territory in emulation of the US doctrine of preemption. All this was meant to malign the indigenous Kashmiri freedom movement, and to make the international community put pressure on Pakistan. However, India lessened its rhetoric afterwards, probably under the US pressure.

President Musharraf, in his address to the nation on January 12, 2002 stated:

“The Kashmir problem needs to be resolved by dialogue and peaceful means in accordance with the wishes of the Kashmiri people, and the UN resolutions ... No organization will be allowed to indulge in terrorism in the name of Kashmir. We condemn the terrorist acts of September 11, October 1 and December 13. Anyone found involved in any terrorist acts would be dealt with sternly. Strict action will be taken against any Pakistani individual, group or organization found involved in terrorism within or outside the country.... Pakistan rejects
and condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Pakistan will not allow its territory to be used for any terrorist activity anywhere in the world.\textsuperscript{11}

President Musharraf also declared the banning of some religious organizations, and ordered the registration of all Madrassahs established ostensibly for religious education. As a step further, fund raising by any organization for the financing of the so-called Jehadi outfits was also banned.

Eventually, it took India ten months to reduce tension and to announce withdrawal of its forces from advance positions from the international border only, probably under heavy US pressure. However, following the withdrawal of troops, and initiation of dialogue in the post SAARC Summit in January 2004, no significant progress has been made, especially \textit{vis-à-vis} Kashmir dispute. President Musharraf's suggestion of a four-part process to defuse the crisis in Kashmir provides a solution to this intricate problem. According to it: a) India and Pakistan must resume an official dialogue; b) both must accept the premise that Kashmir is central to the dispute; c) eliminate from discussions what each side finds unacceptable; and (d) construct an agreement on the basis of alternates to their known positions.\textsuperscript{12} Despite these peace overtures by Musharraf, India off and on claims cross-LoC infiltration taking place. There is a general feeling among the Pakistani public that the US should sincerely play the role of an honest broker to solve the issue of Kashmir. However, the current US policy approach appears to be how to manage the Kashmir issue, rather than solving the problem once and for all.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Afghanistan}

Pakistan's Afghan policy for over two decades (1978-2001) was to ensure that Pakistan had a friendly government on its western borders. Pakistan's involvement
in Afghanistan and its dealing with various Afghan Jehadi group was based on the need to create a consensus among different warring factions, were aimed at achieving a secure frontier on the west. Pakistan's recognition of the Taliban regime was also based on the fact that Pakistan wanted peace and stability in Afghanistan. Moreover, it has a stated policy of establishing relations with the sitting government in Kabul. However, following the 9/11 incidents and the subsequent stubbornness shown by the Taliban leadership that Pakistan has to withdraw its support from them. The ensuing events witnessed the rise of Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance at the helm of affairs in Kabul with Pushtuns completely sidelined from the power structure. However, Pakistan continued to support the UN efforts for bringing peace to the war-torn country, supported the subsequent Bonn Conference and the setting up of the Karzai Interim Administration. However, at the same time, it stressed for including the majority of the Pushtun population into any future power structure. It is to be kept in mind that the Northern Alliance has a historical inimical relationship with Pakistan, and closeness with India. However, now the relationship with Pakistan is improving.

After taking over power in Afghanistan, certain Afghan elements within and outside the government have started accusing Pakistan for allegedly instigating cross-border infiltration by the Taliban remnants hiding in its tribal belt. Growing influence of India in Afghanistan is becoming instrumental in destabilizing Pakistan's border regions with Afghanistan. India not only has reopened its embassy in Kabul and consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, but has also started operating new consulates in Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Herat. The last attack on Pakistani embassy in Kabul on July 8, 2004 was the fourth of its kind, and came at a time when the late Tajik commander, Ahmed Shah Masood's dominated Northern Alliance was dominating Kabul. In the prevailing circumstances the US is the only player to act as a bridge between Pakistan and Afghanistan for
reconciliation between the two. The tripartite commission formed between the US, Pakistan and Afghanistan to regularly review the security situation on the Pak-Afghan border is a sincere step by Pakistan to address Afghanistan's security concerns.

**Strategic Assets**

By joining the US-led war on terrorism, it is assumed that Pakistan has been able to safeguard its strategic assets. Indeed, Pakistan has come out of that period of crisis without any harm to its strategic asset, but only in the short-term. The fact of the matter is that the issue of WMDs still dominate the US and Western threat perceptions, and it is these threat perceptions that dictate the course of actions they follow. It is to be noted that it was through fabricated intelligence on WMDs of Iraq that the occupation of Iraq was effected, which reflects emergence of an alarming trend in the conduct of international relations.14

**Domestic Political Dynamics**

Post 9/11, there has been an increase in the anti-West and anti-American sentiments at the civil society level in the Muslim world in general and Pakistan in particular. This has happened following the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, which the US described as "collateral damage." Besides, malicious media campaign launched by the West against Muslims and Islam, as well as the inhuman treatment meted out to Muslim in the US and Europe in the post 9/11 has added to this anti-West sentiments.

One of the direct outcomes of such developments was reflected in the success of six-party alliance of religious political parties, *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* in the October 2002 elections. Political parties forming part of the alliance
have been supportive of and traditionally have had links with various Afghan groups dating back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Also, anti-US and anti-Musharraf sentiments primarily for his anti-terrorism policies led to incidents of violence against foreigners in Pakistan, as well as assassination bids on President Musharraf and other senior government officials. As a consequence, extremist religious organisations, like Laskhar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), Jeish-e-Muhammad (JeM), Sipah Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ) were banned in Pakistan in January 2002, and their financial assets were seized. These organizations were believed to have links with al-Qaeda, and were previously involved in sectarian violence in Pakistan.

The recent military operations being conducted by Pakistani security forces in its autonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where al-Qaeda elements are supposed to be hiding has further compounded problems for Pakistan. Despite numerous problems being faced by the security forces in FATA, in the shape of material and human losses, Pakistan remains committed to wipe out terrorists from its soil. The ramifications of such operations could impact Pakistan's internal cohesion, along with the ensuing sabotage activities of terrorist groups in settled areas.

Moreover, Pakistani public opinion views with concern any possibility of compromising state sovereignty even to a little degree, such as by allowing foreign troops to be stationed on Pakistani soil and foreign intelligence agencies to operate within the country, or the signing of non-transparent agreements for cooperation on the war on terrorism. All these issues have caused discomfort among the people. There is no doubt that the nation backed President Musharraf's decision for joining the anti-terrorism coalition for safeguarding national interest. But the
conditions and limits of collaboration need to be defined now, especially in view of the deteriorating security situation on Pak-Afghan border, where clashes between US and Pakistani and Afghan and Pakistani troops are also being reported.

**Impact on Regional Security**

The incidents of September 11, 2001 had a deep impact on South Asia, apart from the rest of the world. As mentioned earlier, Pakistan's decision to join the international coalition against terrorism was to safeguard its vital interests, foremost being the Kashmir issue. This was because the entire world community was swayed by the events of 9/11, and countries wrought with issues of separatism and self-determination movements were intending to manipulate the situation in their favour through garnering international support by declaring such movements as "terrorism". Indian government's policy in the post-December 2001 attack on Indian Parliament amply testifies to this fact, when India tried, although unsuccessfully to label the Kashmiri movement as terrorism. However, side by side, the international community also made it clear that "no cause justifies terrorism" that both countries had to think pragmatically.

Having understood the futility of remaining locked in a hostile relationship, a breakthrough was finally achieved during the 12th SAARC Summit held in Islamabad in January 2004. Since then, a continuous sustained dialogue is being pursued by both countries.

Pragmatism at last led to the holding of the SAARC Summit, which was delayed many times due to strained Pak-India relations. Apart from signing the "Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism", member countries also signed the "South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)", as well as the "Social
Pakistan's "pivotal role" in the US-led "War against Terrorism" has witnessed Afghanistan once more joining the international community, and normalcy returning to Afghanistan, although resistance by the Taliban and al-Qaeda continues to be seen. The quick pace of repatriation of refugees from Pakistan, and the successful holding of elections in Afghanistan under the Bonn Conference, as well as the sustained commitment of international community testifies to this fact. As a consequence of peace in Afghanistan, Central Asia is also enjoying a relative stability.

One significant aspect is the growing role of foreign involvement in the region through facilitating peace processes in the region. Starting from Indo-Pakistan rapprochement, ceasefires presently existing between the rebels and the respective governments of Nepal and Sri Lanka testify to the positive role being played by the international community to further the peace processes in the region, and facilitating normalcy in respective countries.

Peace in South Asia depends a lot on the collective endeavors of all the regional countries, and can be sustained through sincerity in resolving the outstanding issues existing among them. The leadership in these countries must realize that the fate of nearly one fifth of the world population is resting upon their decisions, which if pursued with sincerity may take them forward in the 21st century.
Conclusion

In the post-9/11 period, Pakistan has become a crucial member of the international coalition against terrorism and would remain relevant to US interests as long as the remaining al-Qaeda and Taliban elements are neutralized; peace and stability return in Afghanistan; and credible assurances are obtained by the US from Pakistan on non-proliferation of nuclear materials and technology. Beyond that, there are few common interests that would engage Pakistan in the US-led war on terrorism. The evolving Indo-US strategic partnership that enabled India to acquire sophisticated weapon systems from the US and Israel would remain a source of concern for Pakistan, especially in the context of strategic and conventional balance of power in South Asia.  

The war on terrorism, in the short term appears to be succeeding well, but its long-term outlook seems disturbing and uncertain due to the pursuit of other agendas by the countries leading this war. The emerging situation in Iraq, where the resistance to occupation has gradually gained momentum, and continued turmoil in Afghanistan, where besides the Taliban, Pashtun nationalists forces are reemerging against the presence of foreign troops, will have a profound impact on the notion and future course of “war on terrorism”. Pakistan needs to make periodic assessments of the developments, which are taking place in this region and around the world, and adjust its responses accordingly in order to preserve its long-term national interests.

Endnotes


9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.


15. Ibid

16. Ibid.