

*FRC Guest Lecture
Report on*

Situation in Afghanistan and its Impacts on FATA



Acknowledgement

FATA Research Centre was able to hold a series of guest lectures on the significant issues of FATA in collaboration with The Royal Danish Embassy in Pakistan.

FRC is privileged to thank the honorable guest speakers who took out time from their busy schedules and contributed their research intellects on the issue of "Situation in Afghanistan and its impacts"

FRC also would like to thank guests from academia, media and research for their presence and valuable participation in the event.

FRC owes to thank its team for contributing all their efforts in holding the event.

This report is based on the content of speech and address by the speaker and participants at the seminar.

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Introduction

The guest lecture held on 24th January, 2013 at FATA Research Centre (FRC) on the topic of “**Situation in Afghanistan and its impacts on FATA**” is the part of series of lectures by guest speakers exploring ways to achieve peace and culture of tolerance. FRC invites guests who are specialists on the subject so that they may give a clearer picture of the issue. On the basis of the expert opinion FRC suggests a way forward.

In this effort FRC organized a guest lecture on the aforementioned topic keeping in view that the prevailing situation in Afghanistan is affecting the peace process in FATA.

Jan Muhammad Assakzai, an expert on Afghan affairs, gave the insight of the Afghan crisis in details while covering different aspects of the issue. The speaker related the Afghanistan crisis with the internal conflict in Pakistan. According to him, the geography of the region leads the policies of Pakistan where governments tried to influence and manipulate things in Afghanistan to pursue its national interests. Pakistan policies have been revolving around to get friendly government in Afghanistan which accelerated Afghanistan crisis.

The speaker also maintained that there are many other hurdles in the peace process in the region such as trust deficit between the three major stakeholders i.e. the US, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The US tried to lessen the strategic importance of Pakistan while resolving the Afghan crisis which is always problematic, because Pakistan has many cards to play in Afghanistan.

The lecture generates a debate among those who have interests in the issue. The participants included students, independent researchers and analysts.

The discussion concluded with question-answer session which was more or less based on the recommendations on policy level.

Profile of the Guest Speaker

Jan Muhammad Assakzai

Mr. Assakzai is a senior journalist, analyst, writer, author and human right activist born in Pakistan, but also holds British nationality. Mr. Assakzai was born in 1970 in a small village called “Tangae” in Pishin District of Northern Baluchistan (Southern Pashtunkhwa), located in south western part of Pakistan.

He is well known in journalistic circles in London, Washington and Pakistan. He worked with the BBC World Service in London from 1999-2007. Prior to Radio broadcasting career, he was associated with a newspaper Balochistan Times, from 1994 to 1999. He authored Quetta Gazzette in 1994-95 and also contributed to various newspapers in Pakistan on issues of democracy, nationalism, ethnicity and relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, etc. He studied Economics, Government and Politics, at the University of London.

In his youth, he was a political activist and was deeply involved in student politics. Mr. Assakzai has expertise in ‘ethnicity’ in Pakistan. He has highlighted the plight of Pashtun community in his articles.

Key points taken from Guest's speech

Situation in Afghanistan and its impacts on FATA

There are different ways to analyze the situation. The one is the journalistic way to analyze things and situations where we see the situation as it is; it is a sort of surface analysis of the situation. The second one is the strategic analysis of the situation where we think from strategic point of view; geography is the major factor in this kind of analysis. The third one is the academic way of analyzing things; where we generate discourse and counter-discourse in the light of existing literature, historical inquiry and prevailing trends. So, here we will try to combine both the journalistic and the strategic way because the geographic location of this region of Pakistan and Afghanistan border is of immense importance. While looking into what is happening in there, a journalistic analysis gives the prevailing tactical position among the actors and events that are occurring due to the existence of these actors in the region. Thus the conflict in Afghanistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan can be analyzed by analyzing the strategic location of the region, because the incidents occur due to the geographic location of Pak-Afghan region.

While talking about Afghanistan and its long history of crisis, the location of the country cannot be ignored. History tells us that geographic location of Afghanistan often became misfortunate for the nation living there. The internal instability weather in shape of weak governance institutions or ill political setup in Afghanistan has happened due to the extensive interference and involvement of the neighboring countries in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan. The neighbors of Afghanistan have ethnic affinity with Afghanistan. Another misfortune of the geographic location of Afghanistan is its limitation of being landlocked which made it dependent on its neighbors in one or the other way. Many of the analysts believe that due to its landlocked location Afghanistan could not kept sophisticated army to keep the nation in order domestically and to look after the borders. The logic behind the landlocked nature of the country and non-sophisticated army is its limited access to trade and external resources. Sea ports provide good opportunities for trade; while trade and economic resources are directly proportional to the capability of the military forces.

The military forces can bring down the militants and other insurgents to compel them for negotiation. This strategy has been applied in Afghanistan against the Taliban. Therefore the military approach adopted by the US lead NATO forces, where applying coercive means is the only option in combating Taliban, is the misfortune of the Afghan people. On the other hand, if we see the diplomatic way along with the using the military means has been remained comparatively effective.

Another misfortune of Afghanistan in the current era is the fact related to exhausted foreign forces that are at war with the Taliban. The United States of America invested blood and money in this war on terror but now due to the extensive domestic pressure the US want to put full stop on the fight. According to analysts this is not the right time to end investment by the US because the Taliban are not yet defeated and Afghan forces are not capable of standing in front of Taliban.

Another very serious problem in the Afghan crisis is the perception of the US and NATO where they believe that Afghanistan's own forces would be capable to counter the Taliban after their withdrawal from Afghanistan. The reality is totally different to this assumption.

Americans are also suffering with the lack of trust in their Afghan fellows and this is really beneficial for Taliban in Afghanistan. Taliban have remained busy in molding the public opinion against the US in Afghanistan continuously. Even the public opinion in the US is also against the continuous investment in war in Afghanistan. Once the NATO forces withdraw the region, there would be no way that Taliban would talk to Afghan government. Taliban have no intentions to negotiate with the Karzai government. So, the US withdrawal without making the Afghan forces and government capable of countering the Taliban would be drastic for both the state and society in Afghanistan.

People normally tend to slide towards the winning side. So, if the people and the low rank security officials will see Taliban winning in this war, they will simply switch off to them. This notion has been proved even in the present scenario where many of the low rank Afghan security personnel have links with the Taliban on the basis that Taliban would not be resisted for conducting their operational activities. Therefore in future this phenomenon will affect the Afghan security forces' strength against Taliban especially in the post US/NATO withdrawal scenario.

The morale of the Afghan security forces and other officials will be affected further in case of the US withdrawal earlier than the expected timeframe.

The neighbors of Afghanistan have also proved a misfortune for Afghans as they interfere in internal affairs of Afghanistan to pursue their own vested interests. They are influencing the affairs of Afghanistan through various ways. Pakistan is one of the strong neighbors of Afghanistan that has a long history of attachment with the Taliban in Afghanistan and this attachment resulted in reasonable relations between the two. Pakistan is realizing that its stakes are not taken on board while resolving the issue of Afghanistan by the international community. Therefore Pakistan will not be that much supportive in the peace building in the fragile state of Afghanistan, because the peace talks with Taliban would not be effective without Pakistan.

Pakistan can also clam down the Taliban to create space for peace talks with them; but if Pakistan is side lined it will let the conflict continue in Afghanistan. So side lining Pakistan may lead to further instability in Afghanistan.

The Tribal areas in particular and Pashtun belt in general, of Pakistan remained the front line while manipulating situation in Afghanistan. This may be the reason of keeping the tribal people backward, so that the area could be used as a frontline strategically. Just to relate role of Pakistan in managing the Afghan crisis and its strategic importance, one can conclude that there are many spoilers who can spoil any opportunity that will lead to peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The peace and stability in south and east of Afghanistan and the Pashtun areas, particularly FATA, in Pakistan is very much dependent on two things; one, the US/NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan and the other is strategic concerns and policies of Pakistan. Geography, sometimes, dictates decisions and it

shapes the relations among states. In this case Pakistan cannot afford the influence of any other state in the South and East of Afghanistan, especially that of India. Increasing Indian influence in the eastern border region in Afghanistan would be considered a war front against Pakistan¹. So to pursue its strategic interests Pakistan must have strategic designs to counter any influence on its borders ignoring its human and economic cost.

The establishment has to counter the militancy in FATA and/or in Pashtun belt and there are few policy options:

- a) Diverting the militants from their hardcore policies and actions. For this purpose the establishment inserts its own personnel into the ranks of militants.
- b) Direct confrontation with the militants which is drastic for the state.
- c) The use of proxies is also an effective and practical strategy to cope with the militants groups, by supporting individuals and groups against the militants.

All the said options have been used to some extent in the region of western border of Pakistan. The use of proxies is strategically very helpful for the state but at the same level it creates problems for the individuals and also violates human rights.

Pakistan's pursuing its strategic interests in Afghanistan creates instability inside Pakistan. The current crisis in FATA is the result of the Pakistan strategic designs in Afghanistan.

If we link the situations and experiences of the past with the current trends of Pakistan and Afghanistan we would be in the position to draw future scenario. The impact of changes in one side of the border has its impact on the other side of Pak-Afghan border. The situation of FATA would not be changed if the situations of Kabul (Afghanistan) will not be changed even after the US/NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Keeping in view the dependency on each other the situations in Pakistan and Afghanistan are getting complex, on the other hand both the countries have their own problems. So from where and how the initiative could be possible to resolve this shared crisis are the questions of the time. As Kabul is not in the position to counter militancy due to the lack of central power and Pakistan has to contain other stakeholders in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan cannot counter internal disturbance due to its geographic location and the internal instability². So any government of Afghanistan cannot start resolving the crisis from the position of strength. While from the position of weakness Afghanistan government in the presence of the US³ and in the region cannot negotiate with Pakistan to manage the conflict, as it is considered that Pakistan has complete control on Taliban. It is just a perception, they have not been controlled completely by

¹ *Pakistani strategic policies are often based on perceptions, Jan Muhammad Assakzai*

² *Afghanistan is geographically vulnerable, diplomatically backward and militarily weak, Jan Muhammad Assakzai*

³ *It could be the ideal situation to talk to Pakistan for managing the conflict in the presence of US in the region but due to the safe haven for Taliban Pakistan have never been trusted by the US, Jan Muhammad Assakzai.*

Pakistan⁴. Afghanistan along with the international community believes that Pakistan can bring Taliban on table to negotiate and the militancy would be over, but the reality is different than this assumption.

Pakistan has been distrusted by Afghan government and the US while dealing with the militancy in Afghanistan and this distrust will be turned into the continuous conflict; because Pakistan has certain leverages in Afghanistan:

- **Geography:** The geographic location of both Pakistan and Afghanistan leads to a kind of interdependency or even dependency. Strategically Pakistan is very important for looking in what is going into Afghanistan.
- **Human intelligence:** Pakistan can easily penetrate intelligence personnel into the Afghanistan land due to present of the Pashtun population on both sides of the border. According to a dominant view Pakistan's human intelligence is unrivaled and extraordinary.
- **Manipulating proxies:** Pakistan can manipulate the situation in Afghanistan by using proxies.
- **Conflict management expertise:** Due to the long militancy experienced in its bordering areas (KPK, FATA) Pakistan got expertise in dealing with the militancy. So this leverage places Pakistan on very important position while talking about the Afghan issue.
- **Cultural links:** Pashtuns are living on both sides of Pakistan and Afghanistan border and this is an advantage for Pakistan in showing its importance in dealing with the Afghan issue.

Therefore, no Afghan government can afford to lose Pakistan support in the conflict management in Afghanistan.

⁴ *Thought Pakistan has created the Taliban, trained the Taliban but they have not been controlled completely by Pakistan, Jan Muhammad Assakzai*

Way Forward

Keeping in view the above discussion following **Policy Options** are derived:

America: The American combat troops should not leave the region unless the Afghan forces and the government are not capable of handling with the crisis, because the present capacity of the Afghan forces is not compatible with the prevailing situations. The government of Afghanistan is suffering with the ethnic differences inside the state which makes the government weak, instable, incompetent. Thus to coup with upcoming challenge in post US/NATO drawl will be difficult for the Afghan forces in present situation.

The distrust of United State of America on Pakistan has no room in this conflict management and resolution in Afghanistan, because no other state can match the importance of Pakistan in this whole scenario. So the US should not ignore the importance of Pakistan while dealing the militancy in Afghanistan.

Indian influence in the south and east of Afghanistan would not be tolerated by the state of Pakistan. On the other hand it has been noticed that Indian influence in aforementioned parts of Afghanistan supported by the US and international community just to decrease the dependence on Pakistan. It has been seen as proxy against Pakistan in Afghanistan.

Pakistan: Pakistan should work honestly to resolve the issue of Afghanistan. The policies should be based on the ground realities instead of perceptions, because perceptions mislead and Pakistan has experienced misleading policies in past which were made on the basis of perceptions⁵.

Pakistan does not care about human rights and other issues in it western borders areas (FATA), while this ignorance creates vacuum in the social structure of the region. Due to this vacuum the state of Pakistan is suffering with the internal crisis.

Pakistan has been supporting the conservative political groups in Afghanistan just to pursue its own interests which remained very problematic in terms of Afghanistan stability. So it is the right time as Pakistan seems sincere to support dynamic and progressive political entities to end the crisis in Afghanistan.

Other stakeholders: There are other neighboring states which are creating ethnic differences inside Afghanistan and these ethnic differences destabilizing the state and society in Afghanistan. So, all the neighboring states should work for the integration of the dispersed state and society of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan: The government of Afghanistan should not be completely dependent in its strategic policy on the US, because such policy dependency often leads to trust deficit between Pakistan and

⁵ It was a perception on policy level that USSR, back in 1980s, was proceeding to the warm water in Pakistan which was the American planted perception. For this purpose the USSR could invade Pakistan, so Pakistan should contain the movement of USSR inside Afghanistan. Therefore Pakistan fought US war against USSR in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan. The trust deficit is creating problem in the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The complex interdependency on Afghanistan and Pakistan indicates that the joint effort to resolve the crisis would be more helpful than the individual efforts. The present time has been considered as the best time for the initiating peace talk between Pakistan and Afghanistan⁶ to establish regional peace but the US policy intentions hinder both the states in doing serious efforts for establishing peace in the region.

⁶ State level peace talk lead by Afghan High Peace Council (HPC).

Appendix

List of Participants

Date: 24th January, 2013

Venue: FRC Seminar Hall

Guest Speaker: Jan Muhammad Assakzai

Participants:

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Sirrajuddin	FRC Intern
Shumaila Durrani	IIU
Andaleeb Jasmine	IIU
Najeeb Khan	QAU
Irfan Zakir	IUIC
Ali Raza	IUIC
M. Irfan	QAU
Rubab Hashmi	IUIC
Mughees Ahmed Malik	QAU
Fizzah Javed	COMSATS
Saima Siddiqui	NDU
Salman Hassan	NUML