

# Radicalisation

## In The AFPAK Region

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## Abbreviations

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency  
FATA – Federally Administered Tribal Areas  
ISI – Inter-Services Intelligence  
NGO – Non Government Organisation  
NWFP – North-West Frontier Province  
TTP – *Tehreek-e Taliban-i-Pakistan* (Pakistan Taliban Movement)

The Afghanistan and Pakistan (AFPAK) region has been seen as one of radicalisation along with many others in the Middle East. However, aspects of the radicalisation within the AFPAK area are unique to that specific region. Due to its history of conflicts, state instability, social destabilisation and external interference, Afghanistan and Pakistan have become increasingly turbulent. This report will explore each of these factors in-depth and come to a conclusion concerning what makes radicalisation in the AFPAK region unique.

## **Historical Context**

The roots of radicalisation in Pakistan were established during the formative stages of the state, after the Partition of India in 1947. Following the traumatic partition, national security eclipsed democratic procedures as the main aim of the state<sup>1</sup>. Not only did the military encourage a train of radical thought, but also the sheer number of citizens and refugees from varying religions entering Pakistan at the time certainly caused friction. While much of the community was Muslim, there was, and still is, great animosity between the Sunnis, representing [the majority of Muslims in Pakistan, and the Shi'a](#)<sup>2</sup> - a small but influential community.<sup>3</sup> The refugee situation together with Indo/Pakistani disputes over Kashmir resulted in a political process in which the military moved away from an economy of development, to one of defence<sup>4</sup> - a perfect breeding ground for radical movements both as Non-Government Organisations and state-sponsored radicalization. The switch from development to defence was aided by Pakistan's growing relationship with the US<sup>5</sup>, which has had diplomatic [involvement](#) in Pakistan since its creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Talbot, I. *Pakistan: A New History*, 2012, Hurst; this was due to animosity between India and Pakistan, and Pakistan's need for security in the face of regional threats.

<sup>2</sup> There are no precise figures of the numbers of Shi'a, with percentages that go from a quarter to 2% of the population.

<sup>3</sup> Zaman, M.Q., *Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalisation of Shi'I and Sunni Identities*, [1998]

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

1977 saw the rise of General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan, the progenitor of the so-called ‘Kalashnikov culture’ still prevalent today<sup>6</sup>, who established the link between the military and Islamic extremists and increased sectarian sentiment<sup>7</sup>. Zia’s policy of Islamisation has been described as the ‘cornerstone’ of his regime.<sup>8</sup> The process included a reform of the judicial system, contributing to sectarian divisions<sup>9</sup>, and a reform of the economic system that has been said to be one of the greatest causes of the Sunni/Shia conflict.<sup>10</sup> Zia also used state-funded *madaris* constructed in Balochistan and NWFP to form a wall blocking Iran from Pakistan.<sup>11</sup> It has been stated that a system known as the Zakat Ordinance was a step towards Zia’s ‘Sunnification’ of Pakistan. An introduction of an Islamic Penal Code saw the marginalisation of non-Muslims – increasing their vulnerability to charges of blasphemy and eventually encouraging extremist Islamists to bring charges against Ahmadi<sup>12</sup>.

Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan in the December of 1979 and while they were a radical faction in the bipolar world of Communism and Capitalism, they also were key to the rise of the Taliban as a radical group. The Taliban originated from a faction of the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation. This embryonic Taliban had the support of the US CIA and the Pakistani ISI, and was seen as a ‘good’ force in the fight against the ‘evil’ Soviet Union - even to the extent of hailing the soon-to-be infamous Osama Bin Laden as a ‘war hero’.

Following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban continued their rise to power. However, they were not always an organised radical group, but consisted of many

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Kalashnikov culture’ refers to the culture taken on by certain radical groups, in which they use force of arms in order to reach their desired aims.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

different tribes in the Afghanistan region. Mullah Mohammed Omar managed to organise these tribes into a militia in 1994, establishing the start of the Taliban's relationship with Islamabad (which saw this as a way to bring peace to the region). By 1995, the Taliban successfully took control of three provinces, the majority of which were-Pashtun-populated, in Afghanistan. The Taliban's offensive came across setbacks in the form of the animosity between the Sunni and Shia factions.<sup>13</sup>

### **Domestic Policies and State-Funded Terrorism**

Pakistan is officially a democracy, but it presents a powerful military establishment, which has a significant influence on the foreign policy and the security policy. However, the military itself has been repeatedly found close with various Islamic militant groups. Evidence shows that the Army has been [infiltrated](#) at some levels by radical groups, including Al-Qaeda and Taliban sympathisers. This is a result of the Anti-American sentiment that is reflexive of many members of the Pakistani military, which started growing after General Musharaff's [decision](#) to support US policies in Afghanistan.

[Wikileaks](#) has confirmed the widespread belief that the Pakistani rulers are indeed working for the US agenda, which people see as against both Pakistani and Islamic interests, utilising the concept of *jihad* as an instrument against the US and all that it represents. It must be pointed out, however, that while Pakistan's government was identified as an ally of Washington, having denied going soft on Al-Qaeda, the military regime never really tried persuading its people that it was serious about its alliance with the US.<sup>14</sup>

Terrorism in Pakistan has been created and nurtured by the state (as President Zardari [admitted](#) in 2009) to achieve short-term objectives. These [objectives](#) include the fight over

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<sup>13</sup> Siddique, A. *The Pashtun Question*, 2014, Hurst

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Kashmir and the protection from Afghan irredentism over the Durand Line. The ISI trained these terrorist organisations for two reasons. Firstly, there is no accountability for Pakistan over the actions of terrorists. Secondly, those terrorists have been radicalised and turned into suicide attackers, which makes them more effective and aggressive on the battlefield. The decline of the influence of Pakistani government administrators favoured the Taliban rise in Waziristan, and large segments of the TTP are now devoted to Al-Qaeda's global jihad.<sup>15</sup>

In the post-Cold War era in Afghanistan, militant organisations, including jihadist militants, emerged, and the support for these groups was facilitated by disruptions within the Afghan government. Given the structure of said government, which does not allow for any real opposition or political party, Hizb-i Islami and the Taliban represent the only way for people to hope for a political change, in a system in which otherwise they would have no opportunity to express their political grievances<sup>16</sup>. Corruption, as well as failure to provide security and justice, has been consistently cited as reasons for supporting Taliban groups, which easily manipulate such unaddressed frustrations in order to enlarge radicalisation. However, Abubakar Siddique's research suggests that there are three types of fighters within the Taliban's ranks: those motivated by religion; those who seek revenge for perceived injustice by the government and foreign powers; and those who are "holdovers" from the former Taliban regime.<sup>17</sup> In some cases, outrage over government's systematic targeting of Taliban cadres has been a great drive of radicalisation, as well as government incompetence and the already cited corruption.<sup>18</sup> The Taliban continue to rely on their

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Here a clarification is necessary. In the cited report a distinction is made between the "good Taliban" and "bad Taliban", with the latter referring mainly to Taliban groups associated with criminal activities (felt as not serving the interests of the people of Afghanistan). Hizb-I Islami members tended to see themselves as the only opposition force capable of taking over the running of government and drawing from this statement, one could argue that they do represent a political party.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

religious credentials created during their first period in power, benefitting from the popular perception that Taliban leaders are not corrupt. A simplistic style of life, the ability to provide quick, rough justice has helped elevate their stature.<sup>19</sup>

### **Socio-Economic Policies**

In many parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan, governmental infrastructure is weak or non-existent. This has created severe [social problems](#) such as illiteracy, high unemployment, lack of welfare services, and lack of security. The FATA in particular has been viewed as problematic by the Pakistani government, and although [some money has been invested](#) into socio-economic reforms, the region has more or less been neglected. Young men with low social standing, living in such impoverished conditions, [are being targeted](#). The Taliban offer a 'better' alternative, and the opportunity to find an identity that is mobilised by financial incentives, rather than radicalisation. Radicalisation often takes place [after new recruits have joined](#), as the Taliban indoctrinate them with their ideology.

Local militia legitimise their presence by making up for the government's short comings and by [supplying basic amenities](#). If the militia are seen as being on the side of the local people, recruiting locals to join the Taliban and take part in their fight becomes easier. TTP in particular is influential in the AFPAK region and aims to impose its rule into the community.<sup>20</sup> It is also responsible for carrying out various attacks on the state, the most recent devastation that many media outlets have called ['the 9/11 of Pakistan'](#) - the shootings of the school in Peshawar.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Siddique, A. *The Pashtun Question*, 2014, Hurst

Education has not been given the priority that it should receive in the AFPAK region. Girls are worse affected in the region due to lack of support given to them for pursuing education. [Malala Yousafzai](#) – who is now globally recognised for her stance against the Taliban – originates from Swat, one of the many turbulent parts of the region where Taliban ideology has often clashed with mainstream education.

Young minds with much potential are being corrupted with extremist ideology. The Taliban's desire to destroy schools is a way to target governmental infrastructure to further their own agendas in the region. Some madrassas (religious seminaries), are also reportedly [utilised by local militias](#) for recruitment. However, [not all Mullahs are sympathetic](#); although some genuinely may preach Taliban Ideology, and rile anti-government services, others may support the Taliban in order to survive, and others will be pro-government.

The AFPAK region is notoriously divided into various sects and tribes, indicating the lack of community or solidarity in the region. The social polarisation and breakdown of community has meant that civilians have been unable to show a united front against the Taliban. There have been instances where Tribal assemblies of leaders have been attacked, which represents an opportunity for Taliban groups to take over such areas.<sup>21</sup> [Pashtun Nationalism](#) is also a concept that Taliban groups utilise to instil their ideologies, and increase polarisation within the community.

### **International Relations and Foreign Policy**

With root causes of radicalisation being found in the AFPAK region, the [United States' relationship](#) with these two states has become fraught from its war on terror. This is because the current religious political parties gained their votes from [anti-American](#)

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.,

sentiment. De-radicalisation requires both a non-military and military approach, but the US has so far failed to effectively integrate civil society actors into its policy. As such there has been little to no reintegration of extremists back into society. This division has been created by the US drone programme, which has killed 1106 more people than it has targeted. These covert missions against the armed forces and the additional propaganda have turned the radical groups against the civilian population. Any local support the Jihadists have is primarily a way of expressing opposition to the government or foreign actors.

A US report from November 2014 accused Pakistan of harbouring militants in safe zones. This has only further strained US-Pakistani relations, a relationship that has been fraught since the US raid in Abbottabad that killed Osama Bin Laden. There is a grave concern that the harbouring of militants and the issues in Kashmir are feeding into the Jihadi cause; with Al-Qaeda encouraging Muslims in the region to wage a war on India to further their goals. Both terrorist cells and the Pakistani military have allegedly trained these insurgents.

Reports show that these militants receive their funding also from a range of Gulf States. Saudi Arabia remains a crucial contributor to Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba and other terrorist group revenue streams. In a talk to the US congress Hillary Clinton urged for more effort to be put into preventing funds from the Gulf States reaching terrorist organisations in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is important to highlight that it is not just Gulf States that fund terrorism, but there is evidence to support that funds destined for the Afghanistan mujahideen from the CIA ended up in the hands of Kashmir Jihads.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the AFPAK region is an extremely prominent and integral area in understanding radicalisation in the Middle East. The roots of the area show how Pakistan was born out of a period of turbulence and radicalisation, and how the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led to the rise of one of the most prominent fundamentalist groups of the 21st century - the Taliban. This was, in part, due to external intervention - which has also played a part in increasing contemporary radicalisation, which can be seen in the U.S. use of drones. AFPAK is especially unique in terms of radicalisation as it is one of the only regions in which state-sponsored radicalisation has occurred, with domestic, social and economic policies contributing to radicalisation both for and against the state.