5-1-2014

The Taliban and the Crises of Afghanistan and Pakistan

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Recommended Citation

Murphy, Caitlin (2014) "The Taliban and the Crises of Afghanistan and Pakistan," *3690: A Journal of First-Year Student Research Writing*: Vol. 2014 , Article 5.
Available at: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/journal3690/vol2014/iss1/5

The Taliban and the Crises of Afghanistan and Pakistan

Abstract

Overview: Ziauddin Yousafzai is a man who was born and raised in Pakistan. He is a devout Muslim and takes pride in two things – his family and education. He is responsible for the building and running of multiple schools in the Swat Valley – for both boys and girls. His daughter has won multiple awards in school for her work and speeches. Their nation is not perfect, and that certainly needs reform, but Ziauddin believes that education can solve these problems. His life and the lives of his family and friends move on until one word stops everything – Taliban. Suddenly, radicalization is spread throughout his home. This group who is spilling over from Afghanistan gains a substantial amount of support at the very beginning – but who can blame them? The Pakistani government is corrupt and does nothing for its people. Change is something anyone would want. Besides, to Ziauddin and many other people of Pakistan, the Taliban does not seem like a severe threat at first. They preach a return to more focused practices of the teachings of the Quran. While fear is still there, no one in Pakistan is able to predict what might happen next.

Suddenly, as if overnight, he is forced to watched as schoolhouses are bombed, people are executed in the streets - the Taliban has taken over Swat Valley. He remains adamant about all of his children, including his daughter, receiving education and does what most are too afraid to do – he speaks out publicly against the Taliban. While his efforts are valiant, they prove to be useless as the government does little to rescue his home from the invading extremists. Tensions rise, and the violence escalates until he finds himself on a one-way flight to Birmingham, England to stay with his daughter, Malala, as the entire world reacts in shock that even the Taliban would shoot a fourteen-year-old girl simply for going to school. Situations such as the one told above have almost become the norm within not only Pakistan, but Afghanistan as well. Unfortunately, not as many people are lucky and survive the onslaughts as Malala and her father did. For decades, the Taliban has been rising to power in these two Middle Eastern nations. Their extremist views have gained international attention and condemnation and are also responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent citizens during the War in Afghanistan and their invasion of Pakistan. While they have been around since the Cold War, it seems to most the Taliban has exploded into power and influence, especially during the late 20th century and into the 2000s. When the mountainous geography of both nations and the amount of power and influence the Taliban held over people is explored, it is easy to see how a small militia of a few hundred grew so quickly and became one of the largest terrorist threats in the world.

Keywords
MLA, Writing

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The Beginning of the Taliban and Control over Afghanistan

The Taliban is an Islamic fundamentalist group which started in Pakistan. The Taliban movement traces its origin to the *mujahideen* – or "those who practice Jihad" – who were trained in Northern Pakistan, as a response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s (Nasreen, n.d.). When Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq became President of Pakistan, he feared the Soviets planned to invade Balochistan, Pakistan, so he sent Akhtar Abdur Rahman, then the general of the Pakistan army, to Saudi Arabia to gain support for the Afghan resistance against Soviet occupation forces. While this was going on, the United States and Saudi Arabia joined the struggle against the Soviet Union by donating weapons and money to Zia-ul-Haq's program to train insurgents, which essentially means that although the United States was unaware the

Taliban would develop into a terrorist organization, they ironically supplied many of the funds to one of their future enemies (Nasreen, n.d.). Not only is this true, but Osama bin Laden, the future leader of another terrorist organization, Al-Qaeda, and the main conspirator of the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers, was one of this mujahideen who trained in Pakistan to fight the Soviets attempting to take control of Afghanistan and its government.

After the Soviet Union left Afghanistan, the entire nation was left in a turmoil. A civil war began in order to see who would become the first post-Cold War government of the damaged nation. Here is where the Taliban surged in power and influence in the nation. While their numbers began as a few hundred, their stance on Islamic fundamentalism, the practice of Jihad, and their role in fighting against the Soviets during the war helped swell their numbers into the thousands. It did not take long for them to overtake ninety percent of Afghanistan, including the capital city of Kabul. The extremist group easily staked their claim to the government. Soon Afghanistan was a totalitarian theocracy, residing under the name the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. However, only three nations recognized the Taliban as an official government – Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The nations of the UN, including the United States, refusing to recognize the IEA as an official state, citing the Taliban's disregards for human rights and the rule of law.

The Taliban's actions did nothing to disprove the UN's accusations. Soon, Afghanistan was under Sharia Law, the foundation of Islamic fundamentalism. Sharia is the moral code and law of a prophetic religion, such as Islam. It covers everything from how individuals should live their lives morally, to how governments should run their nations. However, those who practice also follow the Quran literally or simply as means to take the Quran and cite religion as their excuse for any laws they may pass or actions they commit. The Taliban used Sharia in order to

make it illegal for girls to receive an education, for any religion other than Sunni Islam to be practiced, and to also oppress women in public, as explained in the article "The Taliban's War on Women". Under Taliban rule, woman had to be completely covered in public, rather than just wearing the tradition *hijab*, which is a traditional headscarf that most Muslim woman wear to cover their heads, as is normal practice in the Islam religion. Women also had to be with a man at all times in public, but only if that man was a member of their family, such as husbands, brothers, sons, or cousins. (Palmer, 2014) As for men, they had to grow a traditional beard. Executions and torture also became the norm in Afghanistan. One could be executed for not practicing Islam properly or not practicing it at all. Girls going to school have reportedly had acid thrown in their faces, leaving them horribly injured and disfigured. Public stoning of criminals also took place, and the bombings of schools and other facilities such as hospitals became too much a part of the norm in the daily life of the Afghan people.

This cruel dictatorship was enforced until 2001, when the United States led an invasion into Afghanistan and removed the Taliban from power. Soon, they were quickly replaced with Afghanistan's current government, a unitary presidential republic headed by President Hamid Karzai. The Taliban nearly fell apart, but due to its large numbers, quickly regrouped into an insurgency. It then turned around and began to fight against the new Afghanistan government and the United States-led International Security Assistance Force, with was made up of soldiers from nations which are a part of NATO. This marked the very beginning of the War in Afghanistan, which is still an ongoing conflict today. The reason the United States became involved was under President Bush's declared "War on Terror" in response to the Al-Qaeda attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. While the Taliban and Al-Qaeda are two completely separate terrorist organizations, the fact that a terrorist group was in charge of an

entire nation caused the United States to seek invasion on the claims of spreading democracy and

rescuing the people of Afghanistan from a totalitarian rule.

Pakistan and the Taliban Insurgency

As mentioned above, the Taliban first formed and gained training in the northern parts of

Pakistan. However, they did not hold as large of control over Pakistan as they did Afghanistan.

However, when the War in Afghanistan began and the Taliban was taken out of power, many

members fled over the border into Pakistan. Here, they began to regroup and attempt to gain

control. They used the Pakistani people's distaste of the government and poor economy as a tool

against them. They preached against the Pakistani government and urged people to return to a

more traditional and fundamental practice of Islam. In order to gain this support and spread their

beliefs, they aired radio talk shows in which they encourage citizens of the nation to return to a

more conservative practice of their religion. However, similar to Hitler and the Nazi Party, they

did not reveal their true extremism until they held some form of power. It was easy to gain this

because of the large amount of public support they received. By the time that support waned,

they already had enough control to become a real and immediate threat to the people and

government of the nation. They quickly took control of various towns and villages, one of the

largest being Swat Valley, which was formerly a famous tourist site near the mountains. Soon,

they began imposing Sharia here. People were beaten and killed in the streets, women were

forced to cover up or stay home, and hundreds of schools, hospitals, and government buildings

were decimated by bombs. The Pakistan government sent in troops to try and remove the

Taliban, but they were ineffective and soon efforts were almost completely abandoned

(Yousafzai, 2013).

However, things between the Pakistani government and the Taliban were not that simple. While publicly, there was an outcry against the extremist group, reports flooded in about government officials being paid under the table by the Taliban to turn the other cheek and even some Parliament members supporting the group's efforts. Because of this, suspicions rose about how much effort was truly being put into ridding Pakistan of insurgents once and for all. These accusations and rumors also caused strained relations between not just Pakistan and Afghanistan's newly instated government, but between the United States and Pakistan as well (Nasreen, n.d.). Pakistan had pledged to assist the United States in the War on Terror and their search for Osama bin Laden, but when the Obama Administration caught word of under the table deals between Pakistan's government and Taliban leaders, they called out the president, Mamnoon Hussain, and demand he either cut off all ties with the Taliban or the United States would cut of all ties with them. This is still an ongoing conflict today. While Pakistan has publicly spoken out against the Taliban and all forms of terrorist organizations, they have still remained fairly submissive in conflicts with them, and Osama bin Laden remained in the country for years without disturbance, despite Pakistani claims that he was nowhere within their borders. Presently, there are talks of Pakistan-Taliban peace talks, but nothing has been set in stone and critics meet this possibility with large amounts of cynicism.

The Taliban Today: Crippled, but Still Dangerous

Today, the Taliban are still one of the deadliest terrorist organizations in the world. They still remain in hiding on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan and are trying to retain control of the villages they have taken in Pakistan. The biggest issue with containing the modern Taliban

is how they hide out in the mountainous regions of western Pakistan and then slip over the

border in order to carry out their attacks on Afghan villages and cities. Because the United States

and NATO cannot enter Pakistan - and also have no desire to - they cannot directly assault

Taliban insurgents and their hideouts.

The twenty-first century Taliban is still infamous for their cruelty towards and oppression

of woman, their roadside bombings and attacks on schools, hospitals, and government agencies,

and the failed assassination attempt of Malala Yousafzai. In recent news, they bombed Pakastani

polio workers due to their opposition of vaccinations, targeted soldiers in various other attacks,

and took credit for the shelling of a United States embassy compound in Afghanistan (Crews,

2014). While the Taliban is in a more concentrated region than other groups such as Al-Qaeda

and the Hezbollah, which are the other two largest terrorist organizations in the Middle East,

they still have millions of dollars in funding and weapons, thousands of members, and access to

social media and other means of spreading their beliefs and threats across the world. The areas

they control in Pakistan, such as Swat Valley, are still under strict control and other than the

previously mentioned proposed peace talks, the government has made few attempts to reclaim

the area, all of them proving to be unsuccessful.

Solutions and Consequences

Varieties of solutions have been introduced and attempted in order to remove the Taliban

from influence and with luck, existence, but finding one which is actually effective is the hardest

task. There are many parties involved in this conflict, such as the United States, the United

Nations, and, of course, Pakistan and Afghanistan. For solutions being proposed by the United States and the Obama Administration, Washington's attention began zeroing in on Afghanistan in 2009 as President Obama introduced new plans to help the Afghanistan government and remove the threat of the Taliban. There is talk of doubling U.S. forces there, and preparations are being made for another supply line into Afghanistan -- this one running through the former Soviet Union -- as an alternative or a supplement to the current Pakistani route. To free up more resources for Afghanistan, the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq probably will be accelerated. And there is discussion about whether the Karzai government serves the purposes of the war in Afghanistan. In short, President Obama's campaign promise to focus on Afghanistan seemed to be taking shape. However, later, in 2012, he promised that all troops would be removed by 2020. As of right now, there are plans to leave 10,000 to 15,000 American men and women in the country as a police force (Delmore, 2013). The plan proposed above at the beginning of the presidency has obviously changed drastically throughout the years, mainly because of the large amounts of anger towards the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and President Bush's War on Terror. Not only this, but it is obvious that our troops are exhausted – these wars have been the longest in American history, even longer than the previous winner, the Vietnam War.

Another proposed solution to the situation is let the nations, especially Afghanistan, simply figure things out for themselves. Some propose since they are under a new government and the Taliban has been greatly weakened, it will be easier for Afghanistan to fend their foes off and continue on the path of democracy in government. There has already been evidence of the people taking government into their own hands in small villages across the country – citizens have kicked out the more traditional and conservative religious village leaders in exchange for younger, more moderate ones which they themselves voted for. Those for American withdrawal

say this is evidence Afghanistan is getting back on its feet politically and will be able to hold back the Taliban without intervention from the United States or NATO. However, there are rational fears that the Taliban is merely lying in wait. While they are carrying out attacks here and there as they usually do, things have been fairly quiet compared to how the situation was in the early 21st century. The opposing side of completely withdrawing troops says this could just cause the crisis to worsen, perhaps to an even larger extent than it was when the War in Afghanistan was just beginning. The reasoning behind this is because the Taliban may be waiting for the United States to remove any and all troops. Once this has been finalized, they could take advantage of the absence of international aid and overthrow the current government, returning the country to a theocratic government, enforcing Sharia Law, and becoming an even larger threat to not only the people of Afghanistan, but the international community as well. Even Afghanistan officials have expressed concerns over the well-being of their country once the United States withdraws, as Sean Carberry explains in "Possible U.S. Troop Withdrawal Plan Worries Afghan Officials". They doubt the Taliban will stay quiet or Afghanistan forces will be able to successfully fend them off if they decide to once again stage a coup in order to gain political power in Afghanistan.

Another solution that has been proposed is peace talks, similar to the ones that the Pakistani government has proposed with the Taliban. This is seen as one of the weaker options, however. The reason behind this is a simple one- the Taliban is not one for compromise. They want not just social influence, but complete and total governmental control over the areas they are in. A treaty is nearly impossible to write up when one of the groups is an extremist faction. Not only this, but many doubt these peace talks in Pakistan will even happen. There are some claims this is, once again, a public façade put up by the Pakistani government to eliminate all

suspicions of under the table deals happening between Parliamentary members and the Taliban leaders.

One of the more effective but controversial solutions is a practice which the United States has been taking part in since at least 2005: the use of military drones to eliminate insurgents. While many terrorists and key leaders of not only the Taliban, but also of Al-Qaeda and the Hezbollah, have been killed with the help of unmanned drones, this practice has not only been called cruel and unusual by the Human Rights Watch Organization, but governments of the affected nations have become enraged, claiming drones bombing in their airspace violates international law, regardless of who they are targeting and how large of a threat these targets are. Unfortunately, the drone program is also not completely accurate when it comes to the targeting and bombing of alleged terrorists. As the term 'alleged' describes, not all of those who are assassinated are one hundred percent confirmed members of terrorist organizations. There have also been many reports of "mistakes" – innocent citizens and caravans have been killed by drones on the misdirected claim the area they are in or the houses they live in are inhabited by terrorist organization members.

Innocent people have also become the victim of collateral damage in drone attacks. What this means is even in cases when terrorists are successfully eliminated, sometimes they are within neighborhoods where completely innocent citizens reside. When a Taliban insurgent's home or base is bombed, the buildings and homes around it are bombed as well, killing everyone within the targeted radius. All of these things are done under only the United States' jurisdiction. The American government has not received permission from any of the governments of the nations in which their drones fly to. While killing Taliban leaders and insurgents can easily drive them away from continuing their violent attacks on people, the use of drones can almost be seen

as the pot calling the kettle black. The United States is flying unmarked and unmanned drones into foreign airspace without permission and killing insurgents and, more often than reported, innocent people, and then for the majority of the time, not even reporting these attacks to the public. This has escalated and will further worsen tensions between the United States and Middle Eastern countries. It is a possible solution, but it has just a many, if not more, negative consequences to keeping or withdrawing American troops, or allowing Afghanistan to hold its own against the Taliban.

It certainly can go without saying this issue is not a black and white one. There is no simple answer free of consequences, both negative and positive, which will affect all parties involved. The Taliban has been a terror to this world for approximately thirty years, and while Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and NATO have been fighting against them, weeding them out and eliminating the group is much easier said than done. While Afghanistan is no longer the main operations base for the Taliban, insurgents still sneak over the border and terrorize the citizens of the country whenever they see fit. In 2013, it seemed as though the terrorist-caused violence had waned, but just last March was the deadliest month for casualties related to Taliban controlled attacks. Not only this, but Afghanistan's elections have begun. The people are now democratically voting for who will be the nation's next president – something the Taliban is predictably less than happy with. This is directly related to the violence that has sparked early in the spring, and the Taliban has only threatened for more as the elections continue from the primaries to the final election between two candidates. Part of the reason behind this is some of those who will be voting are women. Afghanistan's return to democracy has angered the Taliban, which even furthers the fears that when the United States and NATO

finally and fully withdraw from the nation, the Taliban will return with a vengeance, looking to reclaim the government as their own and reinstate Sharia Law.

All of this makes finding solutions for Afghanistan extremely difficult. One would be to obviously keep foreign troops in the nation for even longer, theoretically until the Taliban is a thing of the past or at least small enough they do not pose as large as a threat. However, this is very unpopular with those such as the American people. The War in Afghanistan is the longest war in American history and has claimed many young lives. It goes without saying our nation wants to see an end to it rather than to be told the troops are staying even longer than expected a second time. One alternative to this is already being attempted – training the Afghan military to hold back and fight against Taliban insurgencies. The largest issue with this is Afghanistan's military lacks the technology and equipment to fully stand up against a decades old terrorist organization. One solution to this is when the United States fully withdraws, perhaps the government can increase aid to Afghanistan and supply them with weapons and vehicles to help them stand a chance against the Taliban. This way the amount of money and manpower the United States is funneling into this conflict will decrease, our troops can come home, and Afghanistan can have a chance of holding its own against its enemies.

Pakistan and the Taliban, however, is an entirely different issue. The Taliban's hideouts are in western Pakistan, on the border that is shared with Afghanistan, and their influence is certainly still widespread within the country of the organization's origins. Many portions of Pakistan are not only under Taliban influence, but Taliban control. Even after that, others still are stuck in the middle of a conflict between the Pakistani government and the Taliban for control of various villages and towns. The main difference between Pakistan and Afghanistan not only includes this, but also the fact that there has been no foreign military intervention in Afghanistan.

Nations such as the United States have threatened backlash if Pakistan does not step up in the attempt to remove the Taliban, but nobody in the government has any desire to put boots on the ground. While it may have made sense to move into Pakistan once the Taliban fled over the border, this did not happen and it most likely will never happen. Because of this, military intervention most likely is not a realistic solution for removing the Taliban from Pakistan. Few other solutions remain for the situation here. One that is already being attempted is drones. However, as mentioned above, assault drones are one of the most controversial and widely debated anti-terrorism tools that have ever been brought to light, especially in the sense of how they are being used by the United States government. Drones are being flown into foreign airspace without the permission of the specific country to which that airspace belongs. Not only this, but while they have successfully killed terrorist leaders, they have also killed innocent civilians in the process. Reports have come in of not only complete mistakes of drones attacking innocent caravans and civilian areas, but Robert Taylor in his article "Predator Drone Strikes: 50 Civilians Are Killed For Every 1 Terrorist, and the CIA Only Wants to Up Drone Warfare" has also claimed that for every one terrorist killed by military drones, fifty civilians are killed. The exact casualties from drone strikes is not certain nor can it be estimated – the United States government has shown an extreme lack of transparency over this issue. As a matter of fact, many drone strikes, especially the ones gone wrong, have not even been reported by government officials to the media. These reports have come from the countries in which the attacks have occurred. All of this, and the obvious tension and anger which comes from the governments where their people have been victims to unauthorized drone strikes, has made the use of drones heavily debated by liberals and conservatives alike. Human rights organizations have condemned them, citing how they not only assassinate innocent people, but they also violate international

law regarding restricted airspace and territory. There is no easy answer to ridding the world of the Taliban, or any terrorist organization for that matter, but it can go without saying using drones as a solution will lead to heightened tensions between the United States and foreign governments, increased civilian deaths, and the destruction of buildings and infrastructure within villages and towns. The consequences will slowly pile up on top of each other and this solution can and will easily evolve into just another global problem.

When one looks at all of these issues side by side, it seems as though the best possible solution would be to withdraw American manpower from Afghanistan by around 2020 as President Obama proposed, but afterwards give them aid such as armored vehicles and stronger weapons to fight against Taliban raids and bombings (Delmore, 2013). This way the United States' remaining troops can come home, but the Afghan military will still have training and the equipment they need to defend their country. This is far better than just completely leaving them, mainly because due to how involved the United States has become because of our War on Terror, the Afghan military would become severely crippled due to their previous dependency on American soldiers helping them fight against insurgencies if the Obama Administration signed for them to come home without training their allies or supplying them with weapons that would actually put a dent into the Taliban's forces.

Pakistan, however, is a completely different issue. The same solution would not work for Pakistan because the United States has no forces stationed within the country. Also, the perceived blind eye the Pakistani government has turned regarding some of the Taliban's activities and hideouts has angered not just the American government, but many governments within the United Nations as well. However, the anger and frustration goes both ways – the Pakistani government was livid when the United States raided the compound where Osama bin

Laden was hiding out without seeking permission to come into Pakistan first. However, the Obama Administration's reasoning behind this was if Pakistan's government had known prior, then sympathizers within the government or military may have alerted bin Laden, and he would have escaped before the Navy Seals could get there in time to neutralize him. With all of this in mind, finding a solution for Pakistan is much more difficult than finding one for Afghanistan. If the world wants to completely eliminate the Taliban, then they will have to get Pakistan involved in this conflict. One way could be to give Pakistan an ultimatum. Rather than waiting for peace talks which have been talked about for years, nations who give Pakistan funding and aid could restrict this until they push back against the Taliban. However, this has extreme social repercussions. This could anger the Pakistani people and, theoretically, more and more would become more in favor of the Taliban and their efforts against the Western world. The most logical solution militaristically would be to leave Afghanistan, enter Pakistan, and rid the world of the Taliban that way. However, without the permission of Pakistan's government, this could push tensions - drones, the bin Laden raid, and alleged under the table deals between the Taliban and Pakistani officials - over the edge. As of right now, the solution to the crisis in Pakistan is to communicate with Pakistan's parliament and look towards solutions which have not yet been covered. While this is a bleaker take on the issue of Pakistan and the Taliban, it seems to be the only step forward right now which would not escalate tensions or get more innocent civilians killed in undercover military strikes.

Conclusion: What Can Be Done?

Terrorism has been around in human history for years, but the late twentieth into the twenty-first century has seen it become the figurehead and international war and crisis. The Taliban, al-Qaeda, the Hezbollah have all shown how, when extremist views are shared within a

group of violent people, they quickly become a threat. Focusing on the matter of the Taliban, who are one of the first examples of contemporary terrorism, they have pushed their way into not just Afghan and Pakistani history, but global history as well. They have declared jihad on the Western world and have attacked even members of the nations they reside in for not following the fundamentalist form of Islam. There is no easy solution to rid the world of these menaces, but the United States and NATO have wedged their way into the middle of the conflict via the War in Afghanistan and now have an obligation to see their goals finished. However it cannot be done through drone strikes or completely withdrawing from Afghanistan and slapping a victory sign on these past twelve years. In order to avoid the Taliban from growing into as big of a threat as they were in the late 1990s and early 2000s, we cannot leave Afghanistan for dead. As for Pakistan, governments must be willing to talk to see what can be explored in that nation. Our War on Terror cannot be abandoned if terror is still in the world. Even after the Taliban is crippled or even eliminated, there are other terrorist factions to face. But figuring out what can remove the Taliban from this world could be the next step in fighting against them as well.

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