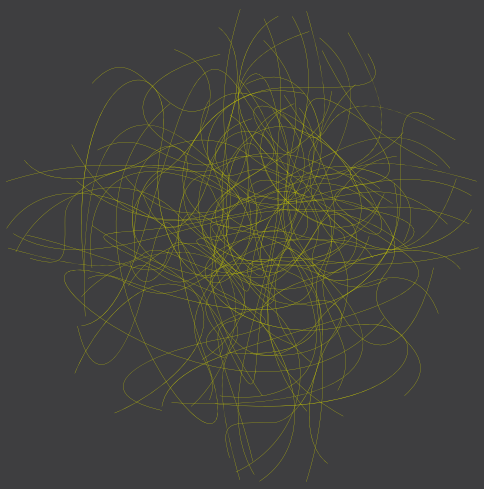
Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Regional Perspective

The Pakistan Taliban Movement: An Appraisal

Michael Semple

November 2014



CIDOB Policy Research Project

CIDOB
BARCELONA
CENTRE FOR
INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS

With support from

NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Michael Semple

Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice
Queen's University, Belfast

Introduction

In October 2014 the spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) announced his movement's backing for the "Islamic State" (IS) and its efforts to re-establish the Caliphate. The spokesman pledged that the Taliban would align their efforts with the Islamic State by sending fighters and military experts to the Middle East. In the wake of the statement, the TTP had to issue a clarification that their admiration for the actions of the Islamic State did not imply any intention to formally affiliate with it. This clarification was necessary to maintain the convenient fiction that the TTP are under the authority of the Afghan Taliban leader, Mullah Omar. Eventually the leadership had to go further and sack the spokesman.

The statement and the reactions to it epitomise the confusion surrounding the Pakistan Taliban Movement. Through this public positioning, the TTP essentially claimed that ideologically it had found common cause with the most dynamic *jihadi* movement in the Middle East; that practically it had links with the IS; and that militarily the Taliban were strong enough to make a difference to the IS. Thus, the spokesman sought to present the TTP as a significant player in a regional conflict with global dimensions. The first round of commentators were sceptical about these claims implied in the TTP statement. They essentially dismissed it as bombast by a local armed group, largely confined to Pakistan's remote tribal areas, which is simply using the media to exaggerate its importance. And yet, for a decade, the TTP and its antecedents have kept the world's eighth largest army occupied in a highly destructive but inconclusive conflict. In the light of the controversy over whether the TTP really matters, this paper reappraises the movement's aspirations, capabilities, linkages and significance.

The History of the TTP

The history of the TTP is inextricably linked to the collapse of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan (IEA) and the subsequent organisation of the Islamist insurgency to counter the post-2001 government in Kabul. The formation of the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan was announced in December 2007, when the commanders of a number of paramilitary

groups operating in the tribal areas and adjoining parts of the then-NWFP (subsequently renamed Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) agreed to merge. The TTP is thus both a product of, and a key actor in, the post-2001 insurgency in Pakistan's tribal areas.

Although the leadership of Mullah Omar's Taliban Movement was exclusively Afghan, during the period 1994-2001, the movement welcomed volunteer fighters from Pakistani *madrassahs*. A significant number of these Pakistani Taliban volunteers were from the tribal areas, in particular members of the Mehsud and Wazir tribes from Waziristan. Three factors contributed to the role of the Pakistani tribal volunteers in the Afghan Taliban movement in the early years. In terms of historical precedents there was a long history of involvement of the border Pashtun tribes in conflict in Afghanistan. In terms of network linkages, many of the tribal youth were enrolled in Deobandi *madrassahs*. These actively identified with the Taliban and were able to facilitate the young men joining the Taliban, without them having to belong to any of the *jihadi* militant groups, which also channelled personnel to Taliban Afghanistan. Thirdly, Mawlvi Jalaluddin Haqqani, the senior-most former *mujahideen* commander to have joined the Taliban, had for twenty-five years been based in Miranshah, administrative centre of North Waziristan. As the Taliban Minister for Frontiers and Tribes, he provided the principal patron for Pakistani tribal fighters serving with the Afghan Taliban. However, the single largest movement of Pakistani Pashtun volunteers into Taliban-run Afghanistan occurred at the start of the US intervention in 2001. Sufi Mohammad, leader of the Tehreek Nifaz Shariat Mohammadi (TNSM) in the Malakand Division of NWFP, led a force of some 10,000 men pledged to defend against the US invasion. This foray proved disastrous for the TNSM as the force had no discernible impact on the conflict and the men ended up dead, captured or straggling back to Pakistan, where Sufi Mohammad was arrested.

With the collapse of the Taliban regime, the Pakistani volunteers returned to their homes and *madrassahs* in the tribal areas or NWFP. But the survivors of the Taliban's international brigades, including experienced fighters from across the Middle East, the Northern Caucasus and Uzbekistan, also sought shelter in the tribal areas. The lack of a Pakistani government writ outside of the administrative centres in FATA made the tribal areas a convenient haven for the bulk of the foreign fighters and their families, whom the Afghan Taliban had previously hosted in the run-up to 2001. While the bulk of the international brigade was accommodated in FATA, smaller numbers of leadership figures from Al Qaeda drew on the support of Pakistani Islamist organisations to arrange shelter in the urban and settled areas of Pakistan.

During the period 2002 to 2004 the Afghan Taliban reorganised in Pakistan so as to launch an insurgency. In broad terms, from the earliest days, the insurgency had one component based in the tribal areas and another based in the settled areas to which most Afghan Taliban and their leaders had relocated, most famously Quetta. A decade later, it is possible to discern the different tendencies in the Afghanistan insurgency, based upon where the instigators have been based. The Afghan Taliban leadership, operating from Quetta and other cities, developed a narrative for their insurgency that focused on fighting the western invaders and their stooges in Afghanistan. They legitimised themselves by

declaring their intention to re-establish the Islamic Emirate that had been overthrown by the US and they declared loyalty to the original Taliban movement and supreme leader Mullah Omar. The Afghan Taliban narrative made no reference to Pakistan and the leadership worked hard to ensure that its forces were only involved in fighting in Afghanistan and that their men avoided any activities in Pakistan which the authorities might deem hostile[1].

The remnants of the Taliban's foreign legion, including key figures from Al Qaida, were at the forefront of efforts to organise the insurgency from a base in the tribal areas. They mobilised tribal veterans returned from Afghanistan, newly armed tribal fighters and the foreign legion's own fighters, the largest contingents of whom were from Uzbekistan and the North Caucasus. The groups that organised in the tribal areas from the outset declared their intention both to expel the western invaders from Afghanistan and to oppose their allies, the Pakistan Army. Al Qaeda propagandists played a significant role in ensuring that the narrative of the new *jihad* included a virulent anti-Pakistan Army element. The tribal area based Al Qaeda agitators and the Pakistani tribal fighters whom they helped to mobilise, described themselves generically as *mujahideen* and initially avoided declaring an affiliation to any organisation other than Mullah Omar's Taliban. However, within the tribal areas, in the years 2002 to 2007 an array of armed groups emerged, generally constructed within particular tribes and their territories, and around "strong men" - commanders, dubbed "*ameers*" who emerged in the early stages of the insurgency.

The approach of the Government of Pakistan and its security forces to ruling FATA helped ensure that the area became the main locus of the TTP insurgency. FATA's special administrative status retained from the colonial period mandates a form of indirect rule, whereby local tribes, through government-recognised elders, are supposed to exercise collective responsibility over their territory. Government therefore only directly controlled administrative centres, main roads and security installations and deployed local paramilitaries rather than the regular security forces. Pakistan´s security doctrine has historically cultivated the idea of the tribes of FATA as constituting a reserve army available to complement actions of the regular army. The prime example of this was in October 1947, when the new Pakistani authorities encouraged tribal fighters to attack the Kashmir Valley. In the 1980's much of the support operation for the Afghan *mujahideen* was located in FATA and a significant unregulated arms manufacturing industry and arms trade have thrived there. As the pro-Taliban groups started to organise, they were able to roll back the limited government presence even further so that government officials were restricted to their cantonments and forts. After this, to secure a base of operations, the armed groups had only to neutralise or co-opt local tribes.

The Afghan Taliban in the settled areas of Baluchistan and NWFP avoided interfering in the administrative affairs of the areas where they were based. In contrast in the tribal areas, international and Pakistani fighters rapidly became involved in clashes with the Pakistani army and started to assert their authority over the settlements where they were based. From as early as 2004 it became clear that FATA, as well as acting as a rear base for the anti-government insurgency in Afghanistan,

1. Anzalone, Christopher, "The TTP's hybrid insurgency", Foreign Policy November 2011 http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/23/the_ttps_hybrid_insurgency for contrast between the TTP and Afghan Taliban narrative

was the site of a nascent insurgency against the Pakistan authorities and a base for terrorism around Pakistan. Most symbolically, the FATA-based *mujahideen*, announced clamp downs on crime and meted out public punishments, including executions. General Pervez Musharraf, as part of his 2001 cooperation with the US intervention in Afghanistan, had deployed troops in parts of FATA. In 2004 in South Waziristan, the Pakistani army launched its first operation designed to retake territory from insurgents. This marked the start of a decade-long campaign in which the army has launched operations successively in all seven of the tribal areas, as well as Malakand Division. Before 2007 the *ameers* who led Pakistan Pashtun fighters in the tribal areas lacked an over-arching command or organisation. Many of the *ameers* had personal links to Al Qaeda figures, but few actually joined that organisation. Despite the lack of an over-arching organisation, in FATA and particularly Waziristan, the range of fighters and groups involved in the new *jihad* in Afghanistan coalesced as an informal Islamic movement, with shared norms and a degree of cooperation.

There was a significant escalation of violence in Pakistan in 2007, in the wake of the army operation against the Lal Masjid in Islamabad. This saw tribal area-based fighters launching attacks against army and government targets[2]. For the first time, the scale of violence in Pakistan approached that in Afghanistan and this violence was no longer a minor spill-over from Afghanistan but rather, an insurgency in its own right. In December 2007, in response to the challenges posed by the spreading insurgency, the tribal area and NWFP *ameers* met and formed an umbrella organisation, the TTP. Although the *ameers* asserted that they were loyal to the Afghan Taliban supreme commander, the announcement of the TTP was a declaration that the *ameers* were no longer simply an appendage of the Afghan insurgency. It gave them a vehicle to pursue and articulate aims that diverged from those of the Afghan Taliban. In the TTP, the *ameers* had a vehicle to challenge the Pakistani state, while professing loyalty to Mullah Omar, whose own forces were obliged to avoid antagonising the same state.

The history of the TTP after 2007 has consisted of a series of insurrections and army operations, interspersed with non-aggression protocols. In the east, the TTP's Faqeer Mohammad took over much of Bajaur Agency and Ahmad Wali took over much of Mohmand, prompting army operations to disburse them. Most famously, activists of the old TNSM, who went on to become the Swat chapter of the TTP, staged an insurrection in the Malakand Division, which eventually provoked an army operation in 2009.

Swat-Malakand has a long history of hosting Islamist-inspired insurgencies, as supporters of Syed Ahmad Barehlvi established *mujahideen* bases there during his 1826-1831 *jihad* against Ranjit Singh and Mullah Sadaullah Bunerwal launched *jihad* against the British in 1897. More recently, Sufi Mohammad and the TNSM had staged a revolt against the government in 1994. For the TNSM the TTP-supported rising was simply the latest stage in long campaign. The Pakistan army also made the link between Swat and the FATA insurgency and so after pushing the TNSM and Taliban back from Swat launched an operation in South Waziristan against the strongest of the TTP component groups, the Mehsud fighters then led by Baitullah Mehsud. After much delay, in June 2014 the

2. Terrorism fatalities doubled between 2006 (1471) when there were 7 suicide attacks and 2007 (3598) when there were 54 suicide attacks. Both fatalities and suicide attacks peaked in 2009 with the Swat and SWA operations. Compiled by South Asia Terrorism Portal http://www.satp.org/

Pakistan army launched its operation against North Waziristan, which had become the most important safe haven available to the TTP and associated international *mujahideen*. This operation, which explicitly targeted the TTP, altered the geography of the movement's by denying it access to the urban centres of Mir Ali and Miranshah. More broadly, the bulk of TTP fighters have been concentrated in the strip along the Pakistan Afghanistan border comprising FATA and Malakand Division. However during the period 2008-2014 TTP *ameers* also developed networks of fighters and collaborators in settled areas including the leading urban centres of the country, such as Karachi. The TTP presence in these areas was clandestine, in contrast to its open operations in FATA. The infiltration of the urban centres both allowed the TTP to stage high profile terrorist attacks on targets in Pakistan's cities, and to become involved in armed crime across Pakistan. Ultimately it was the TTP's activities outside the tribal areas – its summer 2014 attack on Karachi airport – which prompted the Pakistan Army to launch the Zarb e Azb operation against the TTP.

TTP Aspirations & Narrative

In their propaganda material, interviews and statements, the TTP have aligned themselves with the Al Qaida critique of the Pakistan state. They have also highlighted the alleged pro-western foreign and security policies of the Government of Pakistan, claiming that consistently government and army have acted contrary to the interests of the Muslim *ummah* and its *mujahideen*. One of the most potent examples of a TTP leader articulating this Islamist critique of the Pakistan state was the speech made by Hakeemullah Mehsud at the summary execution of Pakistani Special Forces veteran Colonel Imam. Hakeemullah claimed that the Pakistani state has consistently served US interests. He claimed that Pakistan's support for the Afghan *mujahideen* during the 1980's was driven by its identification with the Americans and not out of sympathy with the *mujahideen* cause[3]. Thus, General Musharraf's alignment with the US coalition against the Taliban after 2001 represented the Pakistani state's true strategic position.

Leaders and spokesmen of TTP publicly identify two broad aims. The movement firstly seeks to end foreign occupation of Afghanistan, to which end it acts in support of the Afghan Taliban Movement. Secondly it seeks to establish a *sharia´a*-based state in Pakistan. Before the formal establishment of TTP, Al Qaida figures operating in Pakistan developed an Islamist narrative challenging the Pakistani state. This narrative acts as a counterpart to the narratives of resistance in Afghanistan. The AQ narrative for Pakistan asserts that the Pakistani state is a hangover from colonialism and is therefore inherently un-Islamic. According to this narrative, by clinging to a colonial era legal system and western-style constitution, the Pakistani state is a bulwark for western influence in the Muslim world. The Pakistan army epitomises the colonial character of the Pakistani state. The current Pakistani army is essentially the same one that opposed Muslim interests throughout the colonial period, for example by suppressing the *mujahideen* movement led by Syed Ahmad in 1831, by putting down the Indian mutiny in 1857, and by overthrowing the Ottoman Caliphate and "*handing over Jerusalem and its Al Aqsa Mosque to*

3 Speech by Hakeemullah included in the video of the execution of Col. Imam, circulated in Miranshah and Peshawar

the Jews" during the first world war. Al Qaida's anti-army narrative accuses the army of systematic cruelty against the civilian population, from the 1971 war in Bangladesh to the treatment of Islamist suspects today. They argue that the only language the army understands is force and thus call on Islamists to support the *mujahideen* in resisting the Pakistan army[4].

The TTP has never taken the trouble to elaborate its vision for a *shari'a*-based Pakistan. In this sense, it even lags behind the Afghan Taliban, who at least have a legacy of publications and Islamising legislation from their period in power. Multiple TTP statements have, however, made explicit their rejection of general elections as an un-Islamic import. Beyond their aspiration that Afghanistan and Pakistan be free of American influence and ruled by *shari'a*-based political systems, the TTP has projected itself as an organisation which champions the interests of "the *mujahideen".* In this sense, members of the TTP identify themselves as belonging to and acting in solidarity with a broader movement of militant Islamists. This informed the Hakeemullah critique of the Pakistani state – cooperation with the US in counter-terrorism amounted to treachery against the mujahideen.

Despite the low level of institutionalisation of the TTP, the basic aspirations and narrative seem to be common across the movement. Since the TTP's formation, the movement has maintained a leadership council, consisting of the commanders of component groups and main area-based commanders, plus a single supreme commander (*ameer*). The *ameer* and the movement's spokesmen have been able to articulate the two aims and their critique of the Pakistan state, on behalf of the movement as a whole.

In interpreting the TTP's aspirations, it is important to contrast the far-reaching demands ("scrap the Pakistan Constitution") with its geographically marginal base of support in the country. Each of the component armed groups within the movement has recruited fighters from its core area. Taken as a whole, the movement thus has some membership from each of the seven tribal areas and Malakand Division, with a smaller number of fighters coming from the Peshawar Valley and other settled areas of KP. During area-specific insurrections, such as the Taliban takeover of Swat, they clearly manipulated local agrarian grievances and tried to expand their recruitment among marginalised parts of the population. But the movement has not undertaken any sustained popular mobilisation. Even within areas where the TTP's armed groups have some presence, a minority of the population has actively sided with the movement. But the TTP presence outside its core areas of Pakistan's north is basically confined to migrant networks, tribal Pashtuns settled in Karachi and other major cities.

In terms of linkages with the broader Islamic movement, the TTP has not tried to build links with the constitutional parties, such as JUI[5]. Instead it has some operational cooperation with other militant groups, such as Lashkar Jhangvi and Jaish Mohammad. TTP has neither the military nor political clout, at a Pakistan level, to entertain any realistic prospect of effecting political change. Furthermore the TTP's base of support and locus of activities have remained relatively constant over its seven years of existence. This base of support is limited to a marginal element within

4. Articulated for example in Al Sahab studio propaganda video "Who will You Support?", circulated in Miranshah and Peshawar.
5. In November 2014 a TTP offshoot, Jundullah, targeted the JUI chief in a suicide attack.

the population, basically pro-*jihadi* rural-dwelling Pashtuns. The movement has not been able to operate openly in urban areas outside FATA or to attract significant levels of support within state institutions. There is no evidence that the movement is on a trajectory towards building core political influence or that it has a revolutionary strategy to grab power. Instead it remains a classic terrorist group that, through acts of violence and propaganda, periodically manages to insert issues onto the national political agenda and to limit the options available to constitutional actors. The most direct examples of TTP or its components achieving some effect at the level of national politics are the assassination of Benazir Bhutto and the targeting of the secular-nationalist Awami National Party in the 2013 general elections. Being largely confined to mobilising marginal groups in remote areas and lacking a revolutionary strategy, the TTP does not have any realistic capability to capture the Pakistani state, or indeed grab its nuclear arsenal. The TTP has neither the capability to achieve its stated aim of replacing the Pakistan Constitution with a *shari'a* system nor does it have a strategy to acquire that capability. However, without an overhaul of Pakistan's approach to counter-terrorism and proxy warfare, the TTP will be likely to sustain terrorist violence across Pakistan and ensure that the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier area remains a hub for regional terrorism.

The TTP could more credibly aspire to dictate change in the core areas where it has mobilised. Its component groups have engaged in short-lived campaigns of Islamisation in areas which they have taken over. In the initial stages of the TTP takeover of Bajaur, the movement established what it described as shariat courts. During the 2008 and 2009 TNSM and TTP takeover of much of Malakand Division, the movement's fighters claimed that they were combating moral corruption, initially clamping down on suspected drug addicts and subsequently enforcing a quasi-moral code, by closing schools and restricting women's mobility. However, the TTP was not able to sustain these initiatives in either Bajaur or Swat. In different parts of FATA, while TTP or its component parts have held sway, they have been engaged in highly symbolic acts of vigilantism, such as the public execution of local criminals. But these have not amounted to a credible programme of Islamisation. Instead they have focused on developing and protecting their armed forces and empowering TTP affiliated commanders and, to a lesser extent, associated *ulema*. Their actions in places where the TTP have achieved control show little evidence of serious commitment to achieving social change. At the national scale, the TTP is incapable of enforcing a *shari'a*-based system and at the local level, where it might have been able to, the TTP has apparently been uninterested in enforcing *shari'a*.

Beyond its stated religious motivation, the TTP has never declared itself a Pashtun movement or even championed specifically Pashtun causes. Furthermore, it has directly targeted the Pashtun secular nationalists of the Awami National Party. However the movement's *ameers* and their followers have been predominantly Pashtun and each component group is rooted in a particular Pashtun tribe. Thus, while deploying an Islamist ideology with no reference to tribal identity, the TTP has drawn upon Pashtun cultural institutions and follows a Pashtun tradition of sporadic rebellions by charismatic mullahs and brigands. The TTP does not represent Pashtun tribal society but rather mobilises lumpen elements within it.

TTP Activities & Methods

If the publicly stated aims of the movement do not give a credible explanation of the raison d'être of the TTP, an alternative perspective is available from examining the movement's activities and methods. The TTP came to prominence as a movement that fights against the Pakistani army. The TTP and its predecessors have now been engaged in a decade long campaign of fighting against the army in the tribal areas. It has been a classic guerilla campaign in the sense that the TTP fighters have specialised in rocketing and mine warfare combined with occasional raids on isolated outposts. TTP fighters have periodically managed to concentrate their fighters and over-run significant army and government positions, such as their first major operation in January 2008, when they overran the fort at Sra Rogha in South Waziristan. They have extended their tactic of the large-scale raid to target settled areas adjoining the tribal area, most famously in the attacks against the prisons in Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu. The TTP has been the premier group in Pakistan to pioneer suicide bombing and has at times maintained a tempo in suicide operations comparable to that of the campaign in Afghanistan. The group has conducted multiple assassinations, particularly directed against tribal figures considered hostile to it and Pashtun secular nationalist politicians, considered to be opposed to Islamist militancy.

In addition to the TTP violence against figures associated with the state, its fighters have periodically engaged in sectarian violence, targeting Shi'a civilians. Beyond the ostensibly political and sectarian violence, TTP fighters have been involved in armed criminal activities. The activity with which they are most associated is kidnapping. The TTP uses its combination of a covert armed presence in the cities with safe havens in the tribal areas to conduct kidnappings on an industrial scale. Kidnapping has become both an important source of revenue for commanders in the movement and a preoccupation for their personnel. This kidnapping business encapsulates a criminalised social rebellion element of the TTP programme. By kidnapping members of the Pashtun elite, the lumpen elements of the tribal area project themselves into a position of power over that elite. Seeking to ransom out the succession of hostages, the Pashtun elite are obliged to petition and ultimately pay off those whom they would previously have considered their social inferiors.

Proxy Warfare & Blow-Back

The TTP has emerged in a context with a long history of proxy warfare, where state actors patronise armed groups with resources and protection from the security forces, in return for accepting state guidance on their targeting or other activities. Most serious analysts would accept that FATA has long been a prime locus for proxy warfare activities. However there is no transparency over the proxy relationships – who supports whom. On the contrary, most of what is written with greatest confidence about which government agencies are supporting which armed groups is unsubstantiated and much of it is implausible or wrong. Nevertheless some broad observations are possible.

The TTP has successfully exploited the support and protection that the Afghan Taliban and particular the Haqqani Network have enjoyed in

Pakistan since the start of the current Afghan insurgency. Whether through centrally direction or local initiative, security forces along the frontier have typically been indulgent of armed Pashtuns claiming to be engaged in *jihad* in Afghanistan. This in itself has helped TTP fighters circulate under arms. However, the Mehsuds, one of the core groups of fighters who helped form the TTP, clashed with the Pakistani army in the earliest operations in FATA and thereafter launched a campaign of harassment which briefly succeeded in almost excluding the army from the Mehsud areas. From 2009 the army decided to treat the Mehsuds as a priority target and it went on to launch a clearance campaign in South Waziristan Agency. However the Mehsud fighters shifted their base to Miranshah of Northern Waziristan which had been established as headquarters for the Haqqani Network, the principal beneficiary of Pakistani state patronage. North Waziristan by mid 2014 had become one of the main concentrations of support activities for the insurgency in Afghanistan. Although the Mehsuds made at most a minor contribution to military activities in Afghanistan, they took advantage of the insurgent safe haven which the Pakistan authorities tolerated until mid 2014.

International portrayals of Afghanistan-Pakistan proxy warfare have focused on concerns about how state backing allows the Taliban to sustain their operations. However another aspect of the proxy relations is that the beneficiaries of state patronage are to some extent subject to the state actors' discipline, imposed through conditionalities. For example, the Afghan Taliban value their access to a safe haven in Pakistan and, it is their strategic commitment to maintaining this explains why they have been at pains to refrain from activities within Pakistan which the security agencies could object to. Another example is that within Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban movement has largely refrained from involvement in armed crime. The TTP, by contrast, have long known that the state in any case considers them to be public enemy number one. They have therefore exercised no restraint in their involvement in armed crime.

The TTP's direct involvement in proxy warfare has been through the relationship that some commanders of the movement developed with the Afghan authorities from 2010 onwards. This development was initially propelled by the success of Pakistan army operations in clearing TTP commanders from much of Malakand Division and Bajaur and Mohmand agencies. The TTP's Bajaur and Mohmand commanders shifted into eastern Afghanistan and established themselves there. Over time, they have mounted sporadic cross-border raids against Pakistani forces and have developed links with the local authorities in Afghanistan. By the time of the 2014 North Waziristan, the relatively open presence of TTP groups in eastern Afghanistan had become a significant cause for concern for the Pakistan authorities who expected to be targeted by them.

One of the immediate effects of the Waziristan operation was a flow of civilian refugees from North Waziristan into Afghanistan's Khost and Paktika provinces. TTP fighters followed the refugees and have clearly been tolerated by the Afghan authorities. Although there is no published evidence of the displaced TTP fighters gaining access to the kind of infrastructure which either they or the Haqqanis enjoyed in Mir Ali and Miranshah, they have gained the ability to access and transit

Afghan territory along the frontier from Chitral in the east to South Waziristan in the west. The TTP entrenchment in Afghanistan altered the geography of proxy war and exposed Pakistan to the threat of a terrorist movement with a secure rear base.

The TTP & International Linkages

Since its earliest stages the TTP has been closely associated with Waziristan-based international Islamist militants. These international linkages have resulted in key figures in the TTP such as its deceased *Ameer*, Hakeemullah, being listed as international terrorists. Both leaders of core Al Qaeda and associated groups such as the IMU, have recognised the TTP as *ansar*, or local protectors. The TTP's role as protectors has entailed dealing with the local population on behalf of the foreign militants. The process has been mutually legitimising. The foreign militants have gained local clout and penetration and TTP has reinforced its Islamist credentials by demonstrating an association with the world's premier *jihadist* organisation. The long history of TTP's association with the foreign militants in Waziristan should not be taken as proof in itself of TTP developing a global vision or committing to international terrorism. Periodically and publicly, TTP figures have deliberately associated themselves with attempted international terrorist attacks. However they have not embarked upon this systematically or in a sustained way. Therefore the appearance of TTP *Ameer* Hakeemullah in a video of the Al Qaeda attack on Camp Chapman in Afghanistan should be taken as an example of him seeking to legitimise himself in the constituency of *mujahideen.*

Appeasement of the TTP

Although the TTP has been the target of sustained and large scale military operations in the tribal areas and multiple counter-terrorist raids in the settled areas, the movement has also benefited from an element of appeasement in its dealings with the state and political actors.

The most prominent examples of appeasement have been the peace deals signed by the army and the political authorities in FATA and Swat[6]. The successive protocols in effect conceded control of the territories in which they applied to the *mujahideen* of those areas, as they provided for the interruption of security forces operations, granted concessions such as freeing of prisoners and cash payments and yet provided no credible enforcement mechanisms for good behaviour commitments given by the *mujahidee*n or the local population on their behalf. Although the peace agreements contained provisions referring to expulsion of foreign militants and the obligation of *mujahideen* to refrain from mounting attacks across the frontier, the lack of any enforcement means that the peace agreements seem to have had precisely the opposite purpose – they appeased the tribal area *mujahideen* in the hope that they would focus on *jihad* in Afghanistan and refrain from attacks within Pakistan. The problem for security forces in Pakistan has thus been that for the TTP, the *jihad* in Afghanistan is just one of its aims, and the movement has not been prepared to desist from the *jihad* in Pakistan.

6. For a useful summary see Daud Khattak, "Reviewing Pakistan's peace deals with the Taliban", November 2012, blog downloaded from http://isnblog.ethz.ch/isn-security-watch/reviewing-pakistans-peace-deals-with-the-taliban#.UJJImdQNl2A.twitter

The peak of Pakistan appeasement of the TTP came in the early 2014 attempted talks process with the movement. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif lent his personal authority to this process. The TTP proposed, and the government accepted, an elaborate framework for the process, with the TTP nominating a panel of senior Islamist figures to talk on its behalf, while the government nominated its own committee of interlocutors. The high level engagement implied a government acceptance that the Taliban had legitimate political grievances or demands. However, the TTP made extravagant demands, such as release of prisoners held by the government and halting of security operations, while failing to engage on any serous political issue. The ostensible cause of the break down in government-TTP talks was the TTP attack on Karachi airport on 8 June 2014. This high profile attack was widely interpreted as indicating a lack of seriousness on the part of the TTP in pursuing an accommodation. The Pakistan military, under a new Chief of Army Staff, was in any case prepared for an operation in North Waziristan, which was a logical continuation of the series of operations which the military had conducted across FATA over a six year period. The talks had been the last factor delaying this operation and the TTP simply failed to offer even minimal concessions which might have strengthened the hand of those in government who believed that there was a prospect for a negotiated end to the insurgency.

On a more rhetorical level, the attitude of appeasement was displayed in the reaction from Pakistani political figures to the killing in a US drone attack of TTP leader Hakeemullah Mehsud. Leading political figures including the head of the Jamiat Islami party published eulogies of the dead commander, portraying him as a heroic victim of resistance to the US. The willingness of mainstream political figures in Pakistan to indulge a violent extremist organisation such as the TTP has been attributed to the prevailing confusion in Pakistani politics. A populist anti-American discourse prompts politicians to identify with anyone invoking the cause of *jihad* against America. Those who have internalised this discourse of anti-Americanism have been reluctant to accept that anyone else could proclaim *jihad* against them. Therefore there seems to have been a consistent under-estimation of the extent to which the TTP is prepared to target the state. An element of ambivalence is even built into the campaign of military operations against the TTP. Although the army has committed massive military resources to defeating the TTP, in each operation, the TTP leaders have succeeded in escaping and relocating to sustain their campaign from a new headquarters.

The *raison d'être* of the TTP - Solidarity of the *Mujahideen*

One of the unifying themes explaining TTP actions is that the movement acts to protect the interests of a corps of *mujahideen*. The TTP itself is an amalgam of groups of fighters who consider themselves to be *mujahideen*, with each group rooted to a particular place or tribe. But the TTP is defined by its solidarity with the amorphous wider community of *mujahideen*. The most concrete way in which the TTP have operationalised their notion of solidarity has been through adopting the role of *ansar* for some of the Waziristan based foreign militants - facilitating and protecting foreign *mujahideen* located in territories where the TTP

have influence. But the TTP relationship to foreign *mujahideen* has gone beyond local facilitation, in that its partisans have been actively involved in Waziristan-based conspiracies to conduct terrorist attacks internationally. Although such actions have earned for the TTP *ameers* international terrorist listings and made them a focus for drone attacks, they do not indicate that members of TTP have a developed global vision on a par with the leaders of Al Qaeda. An alternative explanation of TTP figures see this kind of operational cooperation as another form of solidarity – an opportunity for the tribal fighters involved to strengthen their credentials as *mujahideen*, by association with high prestige members of the community of *mujahideen*. TTP *ameers'* notion of this community potentially spans all Islamist groups which have confronted the United States since 2001.

The controversies over loyalty to Al Qaeda versus admiration for the Islamic State (IS) illustrate how the TTP's idea of solidarity goes beyond formal bonds of organisational loyalty. For those in the TTP, the notion of who is or is not a *mujahid*, or who is worthy of emulation or solidarity, does not rest alone on organisational affiliation. The factors include a certain critical level of piety or Muslim credentials. *Mujahideen* should at least refrain from public displays of un-Islamic behaviour, such as licentiousness and should profess that they are serving Islam. They should be warriors and charismatic commanders and those who have conducted feats on the battlefield more easily win recognition as *mujahideen*. And they should be loyal to fellow *mujahideen*, hostile to common enemies such as the US and should be free of links to hostile intelligence agencies or other enemies of the *mujahideen*. The idea of solidarity of the *mujahideen* indicates the dilemmas the TTP have faced in relating to fighters of the Haqqani Network, with whom they were co-located in North Waziristan, prior to the army operation there. The Haqqanis' reputation for having a close relationship with the Pakistani intelligence service indicated that the TTP should have kept their distance. But the practical benefits which the Haqqanis drew from the proxy relationship potentially rendered them useful to the TTP.

The TTP's commitment simply to protecting the interests of the *mujahideen* also provides part of the explanation for the relationship between the movement and crime. The TTP is significantly more criminalised than its Afghan counterpart and has taken no measures to limit its members' involvement in crime, in contrast to the Afghan Taliban. The movement is self-serving. The proceeds of crime are required to sustain the *mujahideen* and that in itself is justification enough for the kidnapping or extortion which it is engaged in. Because the TTP lacks any credible aspiration to establish an Islamic system, which would require some form of regulation of criminal activity, the TTP has been free to consider all activities which generate funds for the *mujahideen* as legitimate.

The TTP Splits of 2014

During 2014 the TTP experienced at least six significant splits. These threw some light on the nature of the organisation and the contrast with the Afghan Taliban movement, which has avoided major splits in twenty years of operation. In the first place in spring 2014 sup-

porters of rival Mehsud commanders, Sheryar and Sajna clashed over who would take over as leader of the Mehsud faction in the wake of the assassination of Hakeemullah. In May, in the run up to the army launch of an operation against the TTP, Sajna announced he was disassociating himself from the movement because of its involvement in un-*shari´a* activities such as kidnapping. Sajna avoided being targeted operation but soon returned to manoeuvring for control of the Mehsud faction inside the TTP, a position in which he continued to benefit from their kidnapping business. After the launch of the North Waziristan operation, TTP-aligned commanders from the local Daur and Wazir tribes, such as Hafiz Gul Bahadur, who had a history of protocols with the army, refrained from resisting the operation and thus effectively delinked from the TTP. In August TTP's main commander from Mohmand Agency, Abdul Wali alias Omar Khorasani, announced that he and associates were breaking away to form a separate group Jamaat ul Ahrar. In September Ismatullah Muawiya on behalf of the "Punjabi Taliban", said they were exiting TTP, and planned to wage violent *jihad* only against the Afghan government, while restricting their Pakistani activities to peaceful preaching of Islam. Then in October, in the wake of the Sheikh Maqbool, alias Shahidullah Shahid´s announcement of allegiance to the IS, the TTP central leadership that they had expelled Shahid and his associates.

By late 2014 the TTP had thus morphed into three main groupings. The TTP a*meer*, Fazlullah of Swat, led the rump of the TTP's *shura* and its component armed groups in a continuing insurgency against Pakistan. Omar Khorasani and Jamaat ul Ahrar also remained committed to the anti-Pakistan insurgency, but free from Fazlullah's leadership. Those TTP commanders more content to heed guidance from the Pakistan authorities had suspended involvement in the Pakistan insurgency but remained armed and available for jihad across the border. In the first place it was state security actions which drove the splits in the TTP. The US assassination of the charismatic Hakeemullah precipitated an enduring succession crisis. The Pakistan army's success in securing Mir Ali and Miranshah denied the TTP and its associates to an urban-based headquarters. The realignments of some of the TTP commanders were consistent with the traditions of proxy relationships and the effective military operation seems to have enhanced state leverage over at least some of the TTP.

The splitting of the TTP into multiple armed groups which sought to retain an involvement in armed *jihad* through a range of different strategies can also be explained as an expression of tendencies inherent within the TTP itself. In the absence of the kind of centralising corporate culture which the Afghan Taliban had developed, commanders splitting from the movement faced no serious penalty. The movement lacked access to centrally controlled revenues, which might have enabled a leader to keep the groups together. The absence of a well-connected headquarters in Waziristan weakened the TTP leadership's control of criminal activity in Karachi. Instead, the strategic units within the TTP were the area-based *ameers* and their armed groups. Aligning with the central leadership under the TTP banner was only one of several possible strategies available to the *ameers*. The 2014 splits left weakened TTP as a national organisation without a single major commander or group actually distancing himself from armed *jihad*.

Implications for Threat Assessment & Responses

The narrative which the TTP has adopted, rhetorically committing it to the overthrow of the Pakistani state and opposition to any western involvement in the region, obliges the TTP to sustain continued terrorist violence in Pakistan as long as the movement survives.

There is no evidence that the TTP has any potential to transform itself into a political organisation or indeed to seek any form of peaceful role. Involvement in violence is central to the notion of solidarity with the *mujahideen* that the TTP has developed. Any political action related to the TTP insurgency should focus on addressing grievances or improving governance in areas where the TTP operates, so as to undermine its ability to recruit or tap local support. A political settlement with the TTP itself, as ostensibly informed the 2014 talks initiated by the government of Pakistan, seems unattainable. However such efforts to address the needs of the population in TTP-affected areas could usefully be supplemented by reintegration packages for combatants who detach themselves from the movement.

Although the TTP lacks the potential to overthrow the Pakistani state, it is likely to continue as a significant terrorist threat within Pakistan and the region. The TTP values its relationship with both core Al Qaeda and the multiplicity of international Islamist militant groups operating in the areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan where it has a presence. Although the TTP *ameers* lack the coherent vision of an Islamic Caliphate which might drive attempts to launch military action across South or Central Asia, the TTP is prepared to cooperate with groups that launch terror attacks from a base in the TTP's core area.

The most immediate regional dimension of the threat posed by TTP regards its expanding presence in Afghanistan. The TTP has proved adept at exploiting links with border tribes, sympathetic Afghan fighters and elements in the Afghan administration, to open up an operating base in Afghanistan. The TTP leadership is ready to embrace a proxy relationship whereby it focuses on conducting offensive operations in Pakistan in return for a haven in Afghanistan. Although the TTP is massively out-gunned by the Pakistan army, by developing its capacity to operate against Pakistan from the Afghan side of the frontier, the TTP has altered the strategic calculus between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This means that any meaningful move towards reconciliation in Afghanistan will need to include not just engagement between the Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban to address grievances and political inclusion. This main track will have to be accompanied by an Afghanistan-Pakistan track aimed at persuading both sides to rein in their proxies - i.e., to secure Afghanistan's cooperation in winding down the TTP, while Pakistan exerts positive leverage on the Afghan Taliban.

Conclusions

The TTP is a classic example of a militant organisation driven by aspirations which it is incapable of achieving, but which has adapted itself to sustain a long-term conflict nonetheless. Compared to the Afghan Taliban, the TTP is under-developed as an organisation and has never

tried to elaborate the kind of parallel state structures which have been fundamental to the Afghan Taliban approach. But the TTP does have an important set of linkages in the global Islamist Movement and has been recognised by Al Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan as a local host and partner for their operations in Pakistan. In this sense, the disputed TTP declaration of support for the IS is indeed significant. The TTP developed in response not to the presence of US troops in Afghanistan but to the presence of international *jihadists* in Pakistan's FATA. It has a decade of experience of symbiosis with Al Qaeda, the IMU and the Afghan Taliban. To the TTP, the emergence of IS simply marks another stage in the development of the international *jihadi* movement and it expects to find mutual advantage in extending the symbiotic relationship to this new movement.

Another of the factors which has rendered the TTP a disruptive influence is that has been unconstrained by proxy relationships with states in the region. In this, the TTP contrasts starkly with the Afghan Taliban Movement, which, to maintain its access to a safe haven within Pakistan has been obliged in its campaign to take Pakistan national security considerations into account. There is little sign of the TTP being subject to any intrusive quid pro quos in return for its ability to operate on Afghan soil. The TTP is thus dangerously autonomous and in planning its campaign of violence is only constrained by its ability to raise resources and evade security measures. The principle conflict to which the TTP has committed itself is that against the Pakistan Army, within the territory of Pakistan. But the TTP is open to association with the broader Islamist *jihadi* movement in FATA and has indicated its willingness to act as an ancillary to other organisations from that movement in extending operations beyond Pakistan.

The survival of the TTP as a fighting and propagandising force, despite the decade of military operations, illustrates the systemic incoherence of counter-terrorism in Pakistan. The TTP has benefited from the Pakistan establishment's commitment to proxy warfare and yet itself is unencumbered by any proxy relationship. Its successful articulation of Islamist causes has helped sustain a state of confusion among civilian politicians, which long persuaded them to cling to the hope that the TTP could be mollified with talks about grievances. And its fighters have repeatedly demonstrated an ability to evade or overwhelm government or military security measures or military operations. The emergence and survival of the TTP should thus be considered an outcome of the politics of *jihadist* groups in Pakistan and the region. It is not directly the creation of any state patron, whether friend or foe of Pakistan. Rather, it has opportunistically exploited regional state actors' propensity to engage in proxy warfare.

Glossary

AQ – Al Qaeda

FATA – Federally Administered Tribal Areas, collective term for the seven administrative units along the eastern section of Pakistan's frontier with Afghanistan. They have a special status retained from the colonial period, and are administered according to the Frontier Crimes Regulation and not the regular criminal code

IEA – Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the term used by the Afghan Taliban for the state which they ran 1996-2001. Since 2001 they have used the same name for their shadow administration and military structures

IS – Islamic State, the movement headed by Abubakr Baghdadi, previously known as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

IMU – Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's armed Islamist opposition which has been associated with Al Qaeda since the late 1990s

JUA – Jamaat ul Ahraar, lit. the congregation of free men, a splinter of the TTP, announced in 2014, to disassociate itself from Fazlullah's leadership of the movement and position itself closer to IS

JUI - Jamiat Ulema Pakistan. The main political party with a base of support in Pakistan's Deobandi ulema. Its JUI-F faction is headed by Maulana Fazlur Rahman

KP – Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the current name for the old NWFP

NWFP – North West Frontier Province, the former name for Pakistan's Pashtun-majority province on the right bank of the River Indus

TNSM – Tehreek Nifaz Shariat Mohammadi, movement for the implementation of the the Shariat, an Islamist movement in Malakand Division, formed in 1992, out of which the Swat branch of the Taliban eventually emerged

TTP – Tehreek Taliban Pakistan, the main Taliban franchise in the country, established in 2007

Bibliography

Abbas, Hassan, "The Taliban Revival – Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan – Afghanistan frontier", Yale University Press, New Haven, 2014

Amnesty International, "As if Hell Fell on Me – The Human Rights Crisis in North West Pakistan", Amnesty International, London, 2010

Peters, Gretchen, "Crime and Insurgency in the Tribal Areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan", Harmony Program, CTC, Westpoint, 2010

Zaidi, Syed Manzar Abbas, "Understanding the Appeal of the Taliban in Pakistan", Journal of Strategic Security, Volume 3, No3, 2010

Wadhams, Caroline and Cookman, Colin, "Profiles of Pakistan's Militant Commanders", July 2009, report downloaded from:
http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/news/2009/07/22/6316/faces-of-pakistans-militant-leaders/

For more information on the project visit our website:

www.cidobafpakproject.com