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PASHTUNISTAN/WAZIRISTAN

Knowledge Construction about FATA: a Critical Approach to Research



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Abstract

This is critique of a paper, ‘Rebels of the Frontiers: Origins, Organization and Recruitment of the Pakistani Taliban’ authored by Shehzad H. Qazi (2011). I deconstruct the paper by pointing out that the author excludes Pashtun sources and favours Western and Pakistani (as opposed to Pashtun) sources in an unwarranted manner. I also maintain that several of the important sources the author draws on are misleading, such as Kilcullen, 2009; Nawaz, 2009; Hussain, 2008, among others. I argue that the paper, which is also marred by some factual mistakes, is misleading.

1) Introduction

Federally Administered Tribal Areas, FATA, of Pakistan has been the focus of the world attention since the post 9/11 US invasion of the Taliban and al-Qaida positions in Afghanistan. Despite this attention, a lot of academic and media literature on the area, its people, culture, history and above all the region’s current security crisis in terms of the war on terror is misleading as I have discussed (Taj, 2010, 2011a, 2011b and 2012). As I shall demonstrate below, the paper under consideration by Mr. Qazi is also misleading.

My critique of Mr. Qazi’s paper is based on my own empirical research in FATA and the adjacent Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province between 2008 and 2010.² In addition, I will also draw on my ongoing journalistic inquiries³ in the area and the information obtained through my ethnic, cultural and tribal affiliations in the region.

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² I conducted this research for my book *Taliban and Anti-Taliban* and for a field report for the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, IDMC, Geneva, (<http://www.internal-displacement.org/>).

³ Since 2008, I have frequently contributed op-eds to various English dailies in Pakistan.

Mr. Qazi starts by saying that the current security crisis in FATA in terms of the Taliban militancy is ‘one of the most complex conflicts occurring around the world’ that nevertheless ‘remains one of the least understood (conflicts)’ (Qazi, 2011:574). The existing narratives about this Pashtun tribal area have been ‘simplistic and full of intrigue’ because they have been constructed in the wider geo-political context of South Asia or in terms of the desire of the local tribal militants to impose *sharia* law in the larger Pashtun region of Pakistan, as well as the brutality of the militants’ tactics (Qazi, 2011: 574 and 575). The author seemingly implies that until now there has not been any ‘serious and sober (scholarly) discourse’ on the post 9/11 crisis in FATA and so he is the one to start such a discourse by connecting the existing social science theories on civil wars, insurgencies and social movements with the publicly available sources of information on FATA (Qazi, 2011:576). According to the author, he does so by dissecting the Pakistani Taliban’s organization of violence, focusing on the structural organization, recruitment and participation of the Taliban militants (ibid). He claims that ‘the Pakistani Taliban are primarily a Pashtun phenomenon’ (Qazi, 2011:587) that is rooted in the tribal society and is driven by ‘family, clan, tribal and economic interests’ (Qazi, 2011:582).

Mr. Qazi’s analysis is based on secondary sources. I argue that the entire analysis is misleading because it is marred by two serious shortcomings: unwarranted exclusion of Pashtun sources of information and uncritical acceptance of misleading sources. I will, therefore, look into some of his sources to explore whether they are even able to provide appropriate grounded information, empirically as well as theoretically, to construct a conceptual framework that appropriately explains the Taliban-related ongoing security crisis in FATA. In addition to this, Mr. Qazi’s paper contains some factually wrong information and he also makes certain sweeping generalizations that I will point out.

2) Exclusion of Pashtun Sources

Mr. Qazi’s almost exclusive reliance on non-Pashtun sources makes his analysis questionable in regard to certain issues. For example, Mr. Qazi mentions some statistics on the numerical strength of Pakistani Pashtun and other militants in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and FATA (2011:587-588). Sources of the statistics are some Western researchers and a retired Pakistani general, Mr. Talat Masood. Based on these sources, he concludes that there are about 20,000-25,000 Pakistani Pashtun

militants. But his conclusion, as well as the number provided by his sources, are totally different from those mentioned in the Peshawar Declaration that was passed with consensus by more than 1000 Pashtun political workers, social activists, writers, teachers, businessmen and tribal leaders from across FATA and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in grand tribal *jirga* (council) held in Peshawar in December 2009. The declaration states that ‘there are 11000 Uzbek, 6000 Arabs and 9000 Punjabi militants (in FATA and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa). From Waziristan to Swat the number of Pashtun terrorists is merely 4000’.⁴ Mr. Qazi does not even mention these figures from the Peshawar Declaration. I am not saying that the statistics in the Peshawar Declaration should be accepted uncritically. I am asking this: what makes a handful of Western researchers and a retired Pakistani general more reliable in terms of statistics than over 1000 local Pashtuns from across FATA and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa? If the former are not more reliable than the latter in the author’s view, then what is the reason for excluding this publicly available Pashtun source? The participants of the Peshawar Declaration are well-known people in their local communities. They could be reached there for discussions. Some of the participants are well-known people at national level in Pakistan, such as Lateef Afridi, Dr. Said Alam Mehsud, Jamila Gilani, Idrees Kamal, among others.⁵ Such people could even be available for phone discussions. Mr. Qazi has made no attempt to reach out to such local Pashtuns for their views.

Similarly, Mr. Qazi’s description of the crisis in Kurram, a political agency in FATA, is not only marred by an exclusion of publicly available local Pashtun sources of information, but sadly, may also be viewed as anti-Shia.⁶ He states that the Taliban

⁴ Full text of the Peshawar Declaration is in Taj, 2011b:198-212 and at: http://www.thesouthasian.org/archives/2010/peshawar_declaration_a_path_fo.html.

⁵ Mr. Lateef Afridi is a leading tribal leader from FATA and a prominent lawyer leader of Pakistan, as well as former president of the Peshawar High Court Bar Association. Dr. Said Alam is a prominent physician from South Waziristan and a leader of Pashtunkhwa Mili Awami Party, PMAP. Jamila Gilani is a Pakistani parliamentarian linked with the Awami National Party, ANP, and Idrees Kamal is a political activist and a human rights campaigner from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

⁶ I discussed Mr. Qazi’s paper with several Shia tribal leaders and students from Kurram who called it ‘anti-Shia’ in addition to terming it as ‘misleading’ and ‘anti-Pashtun’. They called the paper anti-Shia because of the absence in the paper of the publicly available Kurram Shia sources of information, such as those that I mention. Their terming of the paper as ‘anti-Shia’ should also be as part of the frequent complaints that the larger Pakistani Shia community, including the Pashtun Shia, voice about what they see as a ‘systematic anti-Shia bias’ in Pakistani media and think tanks. Since Mr. Qazi’s name apparently looks as a Pakistani name, my Shia informants, with whom I shared his paper, commented that he (Mr Qazi) seems as just another of the Pakistani writers who keep misrepresenting Shia in their writings.

and al-Qaida demanded safe passage via (the Shia-dominated Upper) Kurram for cross-border attacks inside Afghanistan (2011:594). The demand was rejected by the Shia Turi tribe of Kurram and consequently the Taliban have punished the tribe by besieging Kurram through road blockades (ibid). But is this also the view of the Shia of Kurram? Back in 2010, the Turi-Bangash Supreme Council, the grand tribal council of Shia tribal leaders from the Turi and Bangash tribes, issued a pamphlet entitled *April 2007 Riots in Kurram: Background and Front Ground*. The pamphlet categorically says this:

The demand for safe passage for Taliban militants via Kurram is the demand of the intelligence agencies of Pakistan. ... We request the rulers of Pakistan to openly declare that attacks on the NATO and US forces based in Afghanistan are vital for the integrity of Pakistan, if this is their understanding, and direct us (Shias of Kurram) to fight for Pakistan. We will fight for Pakistan. We have also always rendered sacrifices for Pakistan and will do so in the future, if we are called upon, but in the name of God, the rulers must not slaughter us at the hands of the Taliban terrorists. ... Thus the rulers of Pakistan must not demand that we provide safe passages to the Taliban militants via Kurram because we simply cannot fulfil such a demand since it is beyond all our human capacity.⁷

The pamphlet is a categorical declaration by the Kurram Shia tribal leaders about whom they hold responsible for the widespread violence in Kurram. It remains unexplained why Mr. Qazi chose to ignore the collective voice of the Shia tribal leaders and attribute the security crisis in the region exclusively to the Taliban. Moreover, a large number of young Shia tribal men from Kurram have organized several public demonstrations on the roads of Islamabad in which they held the Pakistani state responsible for the sufferings of the Kurram Shias at the hands of the Taliban.⁸ Several of the protesting Shia often commute between Islamabad and Kurram and thus they could be approached by any researchers for discussions in

⁷ The pamphlet was given to me by a group of Shia tribal leaders whom I had invited for a group discussion in Peshawar in 2010 during my field research on Kurram IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) which I undertook for the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, IDMC. The pamphlet is in Urdu. The above quotation from page 10 and 11 of the pamphlet is my English translation of the Urdu text.

⁸ Express Tribune dated 14 May 2011 'Parachinaris: the Second Class Citizens of the State?': <http://tribune.com.pk/story/168364/parachinaris-second-class-citizens-of-the-state/>.

Islamabad. Furthermore, the Kurram Shia have a media group, called Youth of Parachinar, which routinely sends out e-mails to Pakistani and international journalists in which they often hold the Pakistani state policy on Afghanistan responsible for Taliban terrorism in Kurram. All three Pashtun Shia sources mentioned above are publicly known and their exclusion from Mr. Qazi's analysis is unwarranted, if not anti-Shia or anti-Pashtun.

Thus his research suffers from a lack of direct access to local Pashtun informants on the ground. The reason he seems to provide – that FATA remains off-limits for independent investigation (2011:576) – is not always tenable. True, researchers' access to FATA is dangerous, but the people of FATA are not trapped in the area. Hundreds of thousands of them live as IDPs all over Pakistan. Many people of FATA are closely linked with the Pashtun-dominated transport business running between Karachi and FATA. There are people of FATA in almost every state institution and every walk of life in Pakistan, including sports at national and international levels. Any researcher could approach these people, after having taken appropriate ethical and methodological measures into consideration. Also, several Pashtun sources of information are now available on the internet from which researchers could benefit, such as YouTube video clips about the tribal Pashtun resistance to the Taliban⁹, video clips of prominent Pashtun tribal *jirgas* (councils)¹⁰, speeches made at Pashtun nationalist political rallies¹¹, speeches/discussions in other political¹² and socio-cultural¹³ forums. Mr. Qazi seems to have consulted none such online sources.

⁹ This armed resistance has been put forward by the tribes out of helplessness caused by a total lack of state protection of them against the Taliban atrocities. For examples, this resistance by the Khyber Afridi Kuki Khel tribe to the Khyber-based militant group led by Mangal Bagh: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUujgoAYrKI&feature=related>; this resistance by a tribal community in a village near Peshawar: http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=t9EcY-_ZUk4.

¹⁰ Such as this tribal *jirga* under the auspices of ANP: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZR0X2CN6YvM>, and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rC9EKvc272k&feature=relmfu>; also this tribal *jirga*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEZRTXPdNkE&feature=relmfu>.

¹¹ Such as these speeches by Mahmud Khan Achakzai, leader of Pakhtunkhwa Mili Awami Party, PMAP: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O3o_WVjRKA, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqvV9XZhkOg&feature=relmfu>.

¹² Such as this speech by Mahmud Khan Achakzai, leader of Pashtunkhwa Mili Awami Party, PMAP, on the floor of the National Assembly of Pakistan on the issue of Taliban and al-Qaida terrorism in

3) Misleading Sources

Three of Mr. Qazi's most important sources are Kilcullen, 2009, Nawaz, 2009 and Hussain, 2008. All three sources are highly questionable because none of them address serious challenges to research studies of FATA. After 9/11, FATA has been the main battleground of the war on terror. It is controlled by the militants and Pakistani military. People in the region have suffered greatly from the violence from both sides. They live in constant fear and their freedom of expression is under siege. Those who freely express their honest views are killed mysteriously within a matter of days, weeks or months. People have learnt to keep quiet in order to survive. This poses a grave ethical challenge for research in terms of the security of informants as well as researchers. It is pertinent to mention that many journalists have been killed in the line of duty in FATA.¹⁴ Contrary to this, not a single researcher has been killed or injured during research in the region as far as I know. By this comparison I am not implying that journalists have been more honest than researchers. All I am asking is how did David Kilcullen, Shujah Nawaz and Zahid Hussain ensure their own security and that of their informants and their (the three authors') access to reliable information from the latter during their research/investigation in FATA? Their research reports do not address this issue. This seriously questions the legitimacy and authenticity of their field data from FATA.

Secondly, the pervasive fear in FATA has also led to widespread mistrust among the tribesmen and women in FATA, i.e. the people do not trust each other, including neighbours and relatives, due to an omnipresent fear and uncertainty in the area.¹⁵ Everyone fears that the next person might be spying for Pakistan's intelligence

Pakistan: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GapytxiNjvY&feature=related>. Also see this speech by a MPAW activist: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaQQHe0kuUM&sns=fb>.

¹³ Such as this Pashtun discussion about 'what is culture?': http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8c9O_ysPq68&feature=relmfu.

¹⁴ See this report by the Committee to Protect Journalists: <http://cpj.org/killed/asia/pakistan/>.

¹⁵ I came across this problem during my field research for the *Taliban and Anti-Taliban*. Recently, this problem has also been reported by a journalist from the Prague-based Radio Mashal (Pashto Service) during his visit to FATA in connection with a journalistic investigation about the security crisis in FATA and the local people's views on this. The journalist, Israr Mohmand, found that few people were willing to speak openly with him in interviews and those who agreed to do so were warned by others (relatives, friends or neighbours) from doing so due to security concerns. Details of the journalist's experience of investigative interactions with people in FATA are to be found at the following link of Radio Mashal: <http://www.mashaalradio.com/content/article/24615423.html>.

agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence, ISI, the Taliban/al-Qaida or the US and any spoken word might lead to his/her violent death. Many dreadful murders in the area, including beheadings, have made people withdraw from public life or at least withhold their honest opinion to survive. This makes the issue of sharing reliable information on the part of the tribal informants with any researchers very sensitive and difficult. Researchers might be able to obtain honest opinions from the tribal people, but the former need to adopt special ethical and methodological measures to win the confidence of the tribal informants. None of Qazi's three sources, (Kilcullen, 2009; Nawaz, 2009 and Hussain, 2008), inform the readers how they managed to win the confidence of their informants.

With the tribal society's freedom of expression under the siege of terror, there are mainly three publicly available sources of information about FATA: the Pakistani military, FATA-based militants and Pakistani media. The first two sources are biased because they project information from their perspectives rather than from the perspective of the tribal population. Pakistani media exercise a great deal of self-censorship due to external pressures (Nadadur, 2007). The media hesitate to expose the militants or question the militarily dominated security policies of Pakistan and the military has successfully maintained an information vacuum in the conflict zones of Pakistan, namely FATA, Baluchistan and parts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (Yusuf, 2011:108). Thus, Pakistani media are supportive of both the military narratives and the militant tendencies (Mezzera and Sial, 2012). This situation leaves out almost the entire tribal civil society from gaining access to Pakistani media or any other noteworthy sources of dissemination of information. Consequently, this situation also poses a grave challenge in terms of the legitimacy and accuracy of any research studies on FATA, if the researchers are drawing exclusively upon the military, militants and Pakistani media-based sources of information and are not making extra efforts to independently reach out to the tribal society employing special ethical and methodological considerations.

Not only do Kilcullen, 2009; Nawaz, 2009 and Hussain, 2008 not address this challenge, they also draw heavily upon the military sources of their information. The first two, Nawaz and Hussain, also draw upon Pakistani media. None of them state how they dealt with the ethical and methodological challenges in their access to the tribal informants. All of them have attributed the same unsubstantiated claims to the

tribes – e.g. that FATA tribes gave refuge to al-Qaida or that tribal women married foreign al-Qaida men – as have been promoted by Pakistani media and Pakistani writers,¹⁶ apparently close to the military establishment. All three authors have claimed that the Taliban and al-Qaida have killed the anti-Taliban tribal leaders in FATA (Kilcullen, 2009:237; Nawaz, 2009:7 and Hussain, 2008:152). But none of them either inform us how the anti-Taliban tribal leaders resisted the Taliban and al-Qaida or provide the circumstances in which the killings of the tribal leaders took place. Knowledge about these two aspects of the lives of the assassinated tribal leaders provides insightful information about how the war on terror is being conducted by the Pakistani state, as I have discussed in Taj, 2011b. In my own interviews with families of several of the target-killed tribal leaders, they (the families) hold the ISI responsible for the assassinations of the tribal leaders.¹⁷ Unlike Kilcullen, 2009 and Nawaz, 2009, who may only be questioned for breach of research ethics, Hussain, 2008 and 2009 may also be regarded as biased against the Pashtuns. He seems to associate the Pashtuns with terrorism by ethnically profiling them, on the one hand, and on the other hand, he almost excludes other ethnicities in Pakistan, especially the Punjabis, from connection with terrorism (Taj, 2011b:74-77). All three writers have authored misleading knowledge about FATA and its people. By extension, Mr. Qazi's analysis that draws heavily on these three sources is also misleading.

Another misleading source that Mr. Qazi draws on in relation to the security crisis in Kurram agency is Tayyab Shah (2010). Interestingly, unlike Mr. Qazi who seemingly absolves the Pakistani intelligence agencies of any role in the crisis in Kurram, Mr. Shah says that 'many natives of Kurram agency hold (the Pakistani) state policies vis-à-vis Afghanistan responsible for the death and destruction in Kurram'. However, Mr. Shah neither provides the local tribal Shia or Sunni narratives nor specific, grounded information that underscore the state intelligence agencies' involvement in the crisis in Kurram. Moreover, the overall tone of Mr. Shah's analysis of Kurram gives the impression of the Taliban as powerful actors operating outside the contour of the writ of the Pakistani state. This is precisely the idea that both Sunni and Shia of Kurram

¹⁶ See for example (Dogar, 2009).

¹⁷ Interviews that I conducted for my book (Taj, 2011b) and also my journalistic inquiries in FATA.

reject in spite of their tribal or sectarian differences.¹⁸

4) Factual Mistakes

Mr. Qazi's paper is also marred by some factual mistakes, such as the following.

Damadola is one of the major towns in FATA and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (Qazi, 2011:587). Jalaludin Haqqani, senior leader of the Haqqani Taliban network, came to FATA following the post-9/11 US bombing of al-Qaida and Taliban positions in Afghanistan (Qazi, 2011:578). Baitullah Mehsud was a bus conductor (Qazi, 2011:578). The think tank AIRRA no longer exists (Qazi, 2011:599).

Damadola is not a major town in FATA or Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. It is small village in Bajaur (FATA) mostly unknown to people outside Bajaur. The only reason that it became known to people outside Bajaur is the 2006 US drone strike in the village that was widely reported by Pakistani and international media.

A Pashtun from Afghanistan, Jalaludin Haqqani, has been based in North Waziristan long before 9/11. He is one of the veterans of ISI's proxies, who were recruited in 1974 and later trained by Pakistan army colonel Imam in Peshawar for the so-called Afghan '*jihad*'. He settled in Danday Darpa Khel, a village near Miran Shah, capital of North Waziristan. His extended family has become very rich due to their long-standing close contacts with the military establishment of Pakistan. His family owns almost half of the real estate in Mir Ali, the second most important town of North Waziristan, as well as much immovable property in the capital Miran Shah. A signal phone call from his house or *madrassa* is enough to ensure postings and transfers in all government offices in North Waziristan. Also, the Haqqani family has houses in Rawalpindi and Peshawar believed by many Pashtuns to have been given to the family by the ISI where the prominent family members have been relocated due to the US drone strikes on North Waziristan. The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa police under the Pashtun nationalist-led provincial government could not arrest the Haqqani Taliban leaders based in Peshawar in their house located on the Kohat road in the city because the Haqqanis always carry ISI cards in their pockets. They just show the cards and the police back off.¹⁹

¹⁸ My interviews and discussions with Kurram Shia and Sunni tribal leaders, writers, students, teachers, people linked with the transport business and holding government sector jobs, among others.

¹⁹ Source of this information are two senior ministers of the current ANP government in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and a sitting Pakistani parliamentarian associated with the ANP.

Baitullah Mehsud has never been a bus conductor. He was the son of a cleric who was imam of a mosque in the military area in Bannu, called Bannu Cantonment, in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. His father was also closely associated with Jaish-e-Muhammad, a militant Islamist organization linked with the ISI (Haqqani, 2005:301-303). Baitullah himself has been linked with a religious political party called Jamiat Ulama Islam (Fazal), JUI(F) and studied in one of the religious schools (*madrassas*) affiliated with the party.

In footnote 96 of his paper, Mr. Qazi mentions one of my papers (Taj, 2010). In this paper, I question the widely held view in the research communities around the world that US drone strikes on FATA lead to large-scale civilian casualties and are unpopular in that tribal area. In addition to discussing various matters to contextualize the issue of the drone strikes from the tribal perspective, I mentioned three sources, the AIRRA Survey, the Peshawar Declaration and the book *Armageddon in Pakistan*, to substantiate my argument that the drone strikes are neither unpopular in the tribal area nor lead to large-scale civilian casualties. Mr. Qazi refers to the AIRRA survey in footnote 96 in these words:

Taj's own claims (about the drone strikes in FATA), however, cannot be verified because the institute (AIRRA) that carried out the research (survey of the Pashtun tribal public opinion on the drone strikes) no longer exists, and its findings are not available.

It is factually wrong that AIRRA no longer exists. It does exist to this date, but is currently dormant.²⁰ One of the findings of the AIRRA survey (that the drone strikes hardly kill civilians) have been confirmed by several other sources, including a

²⁰ I have explained in my book why this is so in these words: 'AIRRA is the first Pakhtun (Pashtun) think tank that has taken upon itself the responsibility to challenge the fabricated notions about the Pakhtun culture in the context of the war on terror and before it. Journalists and researchers around the world took note of the think tank's work. But work of the think tank has always been greatly hampered by financial constraints. It has always been under-staffed and lacked even basic resources. More than once the authorities cut off the electricity supply to AIRRA due to non-payment of the utility bills. A small core group of researchers and activists used to run this think tank on a voluntary basis. These members are not rich people and like ordinary Pakistanis struggle with the ever rising inflation in Pakistan. The Pakhtun nationalist party, ANP, has not supported AIRRA. A top ANP leader said that no Pakhtun think tank could independently work in Pakistan due to the military establishment's pressure. AIRRA too has been facing some pressure from the intelligence agencies of Pakistan. The current position is that mainly due to lack of sustainable financial support AIRRA is dormant. Some Pakhtun nationalists intend to reactivate it by the end of 2011 through their meager resources. Currently, there is no hope of support from the ANP or any affluent Pakhtun.' (Taj, 2011b:29). The update is that researchers linked with AIRRA, including myself, have not yet been able to reactivate AIRRA. This is because they have not been able to raise the resources required for the reactivation and have no adequate arrangements in place to ensure the security of AIRRA researchers in Pakistan.

serving general of the Pakistani army who had led the army units based in North Waziristan.²¹ The other finding (that the strikes are popular with the tribal people) has also been confirmed by many other sources.²²

Secondly, I mentioned three sources about the drone strikes, including the AIRRA survey, in my paper. It remains unexplained why Mr. Qazi picked only one of the sources, the AIRRA survey, and clubbed it with the wrong information that AIRRA no longer exists while ignoring the others. The other two sources, the Peshawar Declaration and the book *Armageddon in Pakistan*, are too important to be ignored in the context of the drone strikes. As stated above, the Peshawar Declaration is the joint voice of over 1000 local Pashtuns from FATA and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The declaration rejects the assertions that the US drone strikes on FATA kill civilians and are unpopular among the tribal population as mere ‘propaganda’ by the Pakistani media and right-wing political groups. The empirical information about FATA, including the positive tribal public opinion on the drone strikes, in the book *Armageddon in Pakistan* is based on the author’s extensive fieldwork in the area. The author of the book, himself a Pashtun from the area, is close to the members of some anti-Taliban tribal *lashkars* (militias) in FATA, the *lashkars* who hold the ISI responsible for backing the Taliban, as well as for the human and material losses suffered by the *lashkars* and the tribal communities supporting them.²³

5) Miscellaneous Comments

5.1) *Turi and Bangash Tribes*

In the context of the security crisis in Kurram, Mr. Qazi terms the two large Pashtun tribes, the Shia Turi tribe and the Sunni section of the Bangash tribe, as ‘rebel groups’ clashing with each other (2011:581). This depiction of these two well-known Pashtun tribes as ‘rebel groups’ is not only misleading, but also converts the complex

²¹ Maj.Gen. Ghayur Mehmood has been reported by the daily Dawn dated 9 March 2011 in this report, ‘Most of Those Killed in Drone Attacks were Terrorists: Military’. The report is at the following link: <http://dawn.com/2011/03/09/most-of-those-killed-in-drone-attacks-were-terrorists-military/>.

²² For example in June 2012, Mr. Israr Mohmand, a journalist who works for the Prague-based radio Mashal, reports after his visit from FATA that the drone strikes are welcomed in the region and out of their appreciation, the tribal people call the drones ‘*da aazab parekhta*’ (the angel of punishment or the angel who inflicts divine punishment on sinners). The full radio report in Pashto language is at this link: <http://www.mashaalradio.com/content/article/24615423.html>.

²³ I met the author of the book twice during my research for the *Taliban and Anti-Taliban*. He also facilitated my access to and interviews with some of the leaders of the anti-Taliban *lashkars* in FATA.

heterogeneity of interaction among Kurram tribes into an oversimplified homogeneity that is far from the grounded reality. First, Bangash is not an exclusively Sunni tribe – it is a mixed Sunni and Shia tribe. Second, there are several long-standing tribal disputes in Kurram over forests, mountains, water sources, roads, among others. Such disputes have led to many Shia vs. Sunni, Sunni vs. Sunni and Shia vs. Shia tensions and even confrontations in Kurram. Both the media and the academic world have focused much more on the tribal disputes that put Shia against Sunni in Kurram than the disputes among the locals from the same sect, Shia or Sunni. Third, and more important from the perspective of Mr. Qazi's analysis, both Shia and Sunni of Kurram mutually agree that their tribal disputes are not the root cause of the security crisis in Kurram since 2007 when tribal clashes broke out in Upper Kurram which seemingly looked sectarian. They argue that the Pakistani state intelligence agencies systematically exploited their tribal differences to generate violence at a large scale which appears sectarian in order to hide the state-backed Taliban cross-border infiltration into Afghanistan from the sight of the wider society in Pakistan and the world at large.²⁴

5.2) *State Money Transfers to the Taliban*

Referring to the financial sources of the FATA-based militants, Mr. Qazi states that the 'control of the region (FATA) has allowed the rebels (militants) to avail themselves of legitimate economic gain' (2011:592). The 'legitimate' sources also include state money transferred to the militants by the political agents and assistant political agents in FATA (ibid). This information by Mr. Qazi shows that he has either ignored or uncritically read another source he draws on- Akbar S. Ahmed (1983). Mr. Ahmed, also a former political agent of South Waziristan says that the conceptualization of the office of Political Agent (and Assistant Political Agent) presupposes the advancement of the state policy in dealing with the tribal people and the context of the dealing is conditioned by the context of the policy ends desired (1983:143). Now, the question not addressed by Mr. Qazi is how could the political agents and the assistant political agents, government servants who are obligated to advance state policy in FATA, transfer money from the state exchequer to the Taliban militants without the consent of the higher state authorities? This question becomes

²⁴ Based on my interviews with people of Kurram from various socio-economic backgrounds, age and gender.

even more important when seen in the context whereby the transfer of money to the Taliban kept happening simultaneously with the brutal assassinations of anti-Taliban tribal leaders, many of whom have regularly been recipients of development funds and contracts from the political agents in pre-9/11 FATA. Grounded exploration of these issues would provide important insights into the Pakistani state role in the Taliban control over FATA. Also, none of Qazi's other sources explore these issues.

5) Concluding Remarks

With the above critique I have tried to show that misleading research, such as Kilcullen, 2009, Nawaz, 2009 and Hussain, 2008, leads to more misleading research, such as Qazi, 2011. Such misleading research is harmful at two levels. First, it stereotypes the subjects of a research study. In the case under consideration, the Pashtun tribes are stereotyped in line with the Pakistani military, Pakistan-based militants and Pakistani media discourses, narratives and arguments that are driven by specific foreign policy objectives or political interests rather than a quest for knowledge or the public good.

The harmful effect at the other level is that such misleading literature could mislead people of all socio-political backgrounds around the world, i.e. from the proverbial common men or women to the people in power, such as state-policy makers (Taj, 2011b:xi). The issue here is that people producing the misleading literature are people with power, i.e. they have the power to access the channels that put across information to the public and governments. Misleading literature such as Hussain 2008 and 2010; Kilcullen, 2009; Bergen et al., 2010 and Bergen et al., 2011 has been repeatedly quoted by international and Pakistani media as 'expert opinions' of FATA.²⁵ The dominant view among several Pakistani Pashtun intellectuals and political activists is that most, if not all, of the prominent Pakistani authors deliberately conceal or distort information about the Pashtun history, culture, society and the current ground reality vis-à-vis the Taliban in order to promote the Pakistani

²⁵ For example see the editorial, 'The Real Enemy' by a well-known Pakistani newspaper, The Express Tribune, dated 23 June 2012. The editorial quotes Zahid Hussein's misleading book *Scorpion Tail*: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/398185/the-real-enemy/>; this report by Gareth Porter who quotes (Bergen et al., 2010b), 'Report Shows Drone Strikes Based on Scant Evidence': <https://www.commondreams.org/headline/2010/10/18-5>. Here in theglobalreport.com, Kilcullen is referred to in a report, 'US Drone Attacks in Pakistan Backfiring': <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0z5AiYTJqrA>.

military establishment's strategic policies on India and Afghanistan, such as almost all of the 'elite' Pakistani opinion makers who participated in discussions leading to the Jinnah Institute's report, 'Pakistan, the United States and the Endgame in Afghanistan: Perceptions of Pakistan's Foreign Policy Elite'. Their view about the Western writers producing misleading reports about the Pashtuns is that they uncritically follow the Pakistani authors and media as well as do not abide by the professional standards that they are obligated to take into consideration in the production of knowledge.²⁶ Thus, there is a serious problem in the way many researchers are constructing 'knowledge' about Pashtuns through power and exclusion and disseminating it through their privileged access to powerful media and research outlets.

My critique of the studies mentioned above is by no means presented to be disrespectful of the authors. I have identified the over-a-decade-old serious problem in the production and reproduction of research knowledge about FATA. I believe that Western scholars have the full capacity to adequately address this problem. Thus, all I wish for through this critique is to request the research communities to pay a little attention to this issue of misleading knowledge in order to adequately address this issue. Given the importance of FATA for international and regional security, it is all the more imperative that the research communities author knowledge, not an illusion of knowledge, about this region for policy-makers and the general public.

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