

## **Pashtunwali as geostrategic challenge in Pak-Afghan Relation**

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### **Abstract**

*This article basically analyses how Pashtunwali, which is a prominent culture in Pak-Afghan border region, has been turning into a geo-strategic challenge. Pashtunwali is a tribal of conduct in Pashtun majority areas that regulate their way of life. It is primitive conservative gender biased value system that promotes conservatism, tribalism, extremism and use of force to settle disputes. Pashtunwali as a social structure poses three fundamental challenges to Pakistan; promotion of terrorism and extremism, obstacle to mainstreaming of Pashtuns, and mutual distrust with the government, which turned into geo-strategic challenges after the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. Pashtunwali in Pak-Afghan border region, especially, turned into a liability from asset after the four decades of war in Afghanistan and flood of refugees from to Pashtuns majority areas. War in Afghanistan since 1979 created a new social structure that was facilitated by Pashtunwali, which is based upon ruthless bloodshed, rise of Islamic extremism and disenfranchisement of the Pashtun population in Pakistan. This article explores how Pashtunwali has been turning into a security challenge to Pakistan from a local culture due to geo-strategic shift in the wake of 9/11.*

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**Keywords:**

Phastunwali, Jirga, Terrorism, Siali, Constructivism, War on Terror, Extremism.

**Introduction:**

The tribal code, norms and laws of Pashtuns is known as Pashtunwali. This includes the concept of Nang so called as honor. The respect of elders, guest and women is highly regarded as sign of Pashtunwali. It consists of Tarboorwali, Siyali, Ghairat, and resolution of disputes through tribal law called as Jirga. Although Pashtuns compete among themselves but when face with external threat, they coordinate and support each other. Pashtuns are known for resistance to occupation of land and exploitation of natural resources by imperialists force. They always live in groups and communities. Pashtuns have defeated several great powers like British, Americans and Russians to protect their sovereignty and integrity (RZEHAK, 2007). They usually resolve their bilateral issues through Jirga system rather than courts. In Jirga system every party is given equal chance to present their grievances in front of the jury, which is consists of tribal chiefs, religious leaders, and people who are known for their integrity in areas. Pashtunwali also include hospitality; (melmastia) Asylum (Nanawati) and Revenge (Badal).

Geostrategic is about the strategic importance of a country geographical location. It gives information about a country borders, relation with neighboring countries and natural resources. Geostrategic studies evaluate the available options for trade route, rivers, sea route, specific strategic location for the purpose of curtailing immediate threats and building trade relations with other states. It also helps in formulating foreign policy and forecasting the foreign policy of other neighboring states and great powers. Pakistan lies in the middle of great powers like Russia, China and India. Pakistan and Afghanistan shared 2250 KM porous border. Great powers of the world several times intervened in Afghanistan to tackle the emerging economic powers and ensure presence to watch over the activities of South Asia. Importance of Pakistan geostrategic location cannot be denied. Persian Gulf, 70% of oil is transported through all over the world lies near

to Pakistan. In south lies the Arabian Sea and in the north is the Wakhan strip separating Tajikistan from Pakistan.

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 19 79 during the Cold war further increased the geo-strategic importance of Pakistan. The US in alliance with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia indirectly restricted the expansion of Soviet forces in Afghanistan by providing military support to Mujaideen. As a result millions of refugees came to Pakistan in time of Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Again after 9/11 incident, Pakistan was given strict instructions from the US to help in curbing War on Terror. Pakistan became reliable on US aid and 70 thousand people live lost and results in major security challenges (Gall, 2014). The US State department and American think tanks several times realized that War in Afghanistan could never be won without the help of Pakistan.

Containing the rise of China as economic power is another challenge for US. CPEC project will be affected in future if the tension between US and China does not stop. Pak-Afghan relationship several times reached to lowest point due to blame game. Terrorists have halted the Afghan peace process, every time the peace process starts terrorist attacks inside Pakistan and Afghanistan and the peace process gets delayed. Pakistan want peace in its neighboring countries and peace in Afghanistan can be brought by mutual trust and cooperation.

The location of Pakistan in world map is bigger problem for Pakistan itself due to great power interest in the region. There are multiple players and new actors who have entered the region after 9/11. India and Iran is in continuous struggle to influence Afghanistan's future stability when foreign troops leave Afghanistan. Blame game, mistrust and assuming Pakistan responsible for all the troubles in Afghanistan continuously derailed the improvement of relations between both Pak-Afghan relations.

### **Theoretical Perspective:**

Constructivism is a theory of international relations that believe in the influence of culture, norms and values in a country foreign policy. It says that it is fundamentally important to understand the culture, religion and politics of a country to understand the identity and national interest of that country. This paper analyses how Pashtunwali as geo-strategic challenge affect the bilateral relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This paper

is basically interested to analyze how Pashtunwali as culture, norm and values have affected the security of Pakistan and its relationship with Afghanistan. Constructivists argue about individual cannot be isolated from environment and the role of norms, homogeneity of understandings between different actors and its interaction among themselves shapes the environment. According to Constructivists neither identity nor the shared interests can be put aside from a society. According to Richard Ned Lebow, culture and identity play its role and shape the political order in international relations. He criticizes the positivist work of assuming international relations as unchanging, timeless and universal. Lebow questions how beliefs and norms are in contact and what shapes the specific role of an actor with in interaction of different actors (Lebow,2010).

### **Pashtunwali as social framework**

Pashtuns are the second largest minority in Pakistan. They are 15% of the country two hundred million populations. Pashtuns in Pakistan live in Khyber Pushthunkhawa, North West Balochistan, and Karachi. The topography of their region is “towering mountain ranges, narrow valleys, desert plains, and rocky, barren wasteland” (Johnson & Mason, 2008, p43). They live on 1640 miles long Pak-Afghan border. According to Abubakar Saddique,

*While accurate current census data is lacking, it can be estimated that at least forty million—and perhaps as many as fifty million—Pashtuns live in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pashtuns are estimated to constitute nearly half of Afghanistan’s population of 25.5 million. They are Pakistan’s largest minority, making up about 15–20 per cent of the country’s 174 million citizens in 2010 (2014, p27).*

The traffic at Pak-Afghan border is regulated at two officially established points; the north end at Torkhem and south section is at Chaman point. This region, inhabited by Pashtuns, has always been at the border of either great empires or major powers, which significantly affected their socio-political structures. Their geo-strategic location; at the cross-road of great international and regional powers, have profoundly influenced the evolution of Pashtuns’ social structure. According to Siddique, Pashtun’s land has always been a curse for them,

*Their land, near the center of the Eurasian landmass, has for centuries been both a contested zone and a crossroads of cultures and civilizations. The latest transformation began when the Cold War became a hot war with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. What had begun as an indigenous nationalist resistance to a domestic communist coup was, upon the arrival of Soviet troops, swiftly transformed into a religious struggle, or jihad. Leaders in neighboring Pakistan encouraged the jihad—partly over fears that the perpetuation of unfettered Afghan nationalism could lead to renewed irredentist Afghan claims to Pakistani territory. Islamabad also feared a surge of ethno-nationalism among Pakistani Pashtuns (2014, p29/217).*

The large majority of Pashtuns is Sunni Muslims and belongs to Hanafi School of thought. A small number of them are Shiites, primarily living in Kurram Agency of the FATA. The southern section of the border is home to three major groups of Pashtuns. Beginning at the Pishin hills and running east to the FATA live Pashtuns of the Ghurghusht and Karlanri tribes. Of all the Pashtun tribes, the Waziris of greater Waziristan (a region that includes North Waziristan Agency, South Waziristan Agency, and the Bermol District of Afghanistan's Paktika Province) are reputed to be the most conservative and irascible. The Waziris pride themselves on never having paid taxes to any sovereign and never having their lands, which they consider veiled, or in purdah, conquered (Johnson & Mason, 2008, p47).

#### **Pashtunwali and Geo-strategic challenges in Pak-Afghan relation:**

The presence of Pashtunwali in Pashtun's culture on both sides of the border has seriously affected the bilateral relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pashtunwali, which is a strict code of life promoting conservatism, tribalism and gender inequality created a masculine society. Pashtunwali has also promoted extremism in Pashtun belt of Pakistan, which has strategically affected Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan. According to Johnson and Mason,

*The Taliban is neither unique nor a new phenomenon to the Pashtun border area. Historically, many jihadi groups and charismatic religious leaders similar to the Taliban have arisen from this area at generational intervals to challenge governments on both sides of the border. For example, a remarkably similar to Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed*

*Omar, Mirza Ali Khan—a Tori Khel Waziri Pashtun known to the West as the Fakir of Ipi—led British and later Pakistani security forces on a frustrating chase around the frontier for thirty years. Protected by his Pashtun tribal supporters in the mountains, he was never caught (2008, p53).*

FATA (Federally administered Tribal Areas), KP (Khyber Pushthunkhawa) and Baluchistan are the worst affected areas of terrorism because of the presence of Pashtunwali culture. Various Schools, colleges and religious seminaries are destroyed in Pashtun belt. These terrorists' activities are against the Pashtun traditions. More than 450 tribal leaders have lost their lives and their tribal system is fractured (Ginsburg, 2011). There is a fear that in Pakistan's security establishment that it will again face massive security challenges from instability in Afghanistan as at the time of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The presence of NATO and ISAF in Afghanistan is similar kind of challenge for Pakistan due to continuous war and breakup of peace agreement with the Taliban. The trust deficit in bilateral relation between Pakistan and Afghanistan will further increase security dilemma between the two countries and locked them into a permanent conflict Islamabad and New Delhi. This security dilemma and bilateral conflict could also affect Pakistan's relation with the US and NATO, because of the later presence in Afghanistan. It could also encourage terrorism, smuggling, lawlessness in the region, drug trafficking and violence in Pashtuns conservative society, which is already prone to conflict due to badal characteristic of Pashtunwali.

The trust deficit and security situation started improving after the visit of President's Ashraf Ghani to Pakistan after winning the election in June 2014 in which both countries agreed to work mutually for Peace and security in the region. Afghan National Army also attended a training course in Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) which was opposed by the previous Afghan government.

The relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan again deteriorated after terrorist attack on Army Public School (APS) Peshawar that resulted in 141 children killed and hundreds of them wounded. Pakistan blamed that Afghanistan based terrorist organization Tarik Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was responsible for the attack and asked the Afghan Government to take

stringent action against them. Trilateral meeting was inaugurated in Islamabad on December 23, 2014 between Afghan National Army chief, ISAF commander Gen. John Campbell and Pakistani Army chief Raheel Sharif to improve cross border management and peace on both sides of Pak-Afghan border (Kathrine, 2011). Every time there is an attack in either of the two countries, it increases mutual distrust between both neighboring countries that share common culture, religion and value. There should be a mutual agreement between them that terrorism and terrorists are their biggest enemy, therefore they need to work together to address the menace of terrorism.

### **Pashtunistan issue:**

Durand line, the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, is settled in 1893 and Emir of Afghanistan, King Abdur Rahman opposed British formula. This border line divided the Pashtuns living on both sides of the border. The Afghan government has always been critical of the Durrand line. After the independence of Pakistan, the Pashtunistan issue emerged as the bone of contention between two friendly neighboring countries. Pashtunistan means the “the land of Pashtuns”. The main aim of Afghanistan behind the Pashtunistan issue was to merge the strategic areas of Pakistan tribal belt, Balochistan and Khyber Pashtunkhawa into Afghanistan to solve the weakness of the country and get access to sea through Gawadar (Singh, 2014).

Afghanistan was the first country in the United Nations that opposed the recognition of Pakistan due to Durrand line issue. President Daud especially took strong position and was very vocal against Pakistan on Pashtunistan issue. He even burnt Pakistani flag in protest after Islamabad extended its control to tribal belt and called his ambassador back from Pakistan. The Afghan Lashkar even attacked Bajour but failed to capture the agency. President Daud was also accused of providing shelter, weapons and training to Pashtun and Baloch insurgent and separatist forces in 1970s. Ethnic insurgency in Pakistan started with the help Afghanistan in 1970s at the time of separation of East Pakistan, known as Bangladesh, which profoundly affected the bilateral relationship. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto started operations in FATA and Balochistan to suppress the nationalist forces and weakened the Pashtunistan movement. The Pashtunistan issue had been a

burning issue in the bilateral relation till the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan then opened a new chapter in the bilateral relationship, which was characterized by great power intervention, use of proxy against each other and the rise of Islamic extremism at the horizon.

**Conclusion:**

Pakistan and Afghanistan shared long porous border and ethnic and religious similarities. Pakistan and Afghanistan both have geo-strategic interests. There is an opportunity an opportunity for both states to turn Pashtunwali from liability into asset by stressing upon the similarities and undermines differences. Pashtunwali in its current form is bone of contention between Pakistan and Afghanistan and seriously affected the bilateral relationship between the two countries. It was the Pashtun factor and by extension Pashtunwali, which initiated the rivalry between Kabul and Islamabad. There are number of examples when minorities of one ethnic group living in different countries that are sources of friendship rather than rivalry. Unfortunately, in Pak-Afghan region, Pashtunwali has promoted the rise of Islamic extremism, rivalry between Pakistan and Afghanistan and promotion of a rigid society based upon conservation of traditional primitive tribal gender biased values, Islam and frequent use of violence to resolve bilateral issues. Pashtunwali, which was a cultural national identity issue at the beginning has turned into geo-strategic challenge after the rise of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISIS from Pashtun majority areas.



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