
Pashtunwali as a Geo-strategic Asset for Pakistan

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Abstract:

This article basically analyses how Pashtunwali, which is a prominent culture in Pak-Afghan border region, could be turned into a geo-strategic asset in Pakistan. Pashtunwali is a tribal code of conduct in Pashtun majority areas that regulate their way of life. It is a primitive value system that promotes egalitarianism, uniformity and resolution of dispute through Jirga system. Pashtunwali, as an alternate form of governance system, promotes speedy justice, egalitarian values and community service, if implemented in its true spirit, could create an ideal society in Pak-Afghan border region. There are three dynamics of Pashtunwali, which could turn it into a geo-strategic asset for Pakistan. Firstly, it is one of the most established social structures to fight extremism and terrorism. Therefore the early targets of terrorists were not security personnel, but tribal chiefs. For example Afzal Lala of Swat, who is a tribal chief, is brand name against the Taliban in Swat. Secondly, it could also improve state and society relationship by ameliorating services system, especially delivery of speedy and cheap justice as during the time of Wali-e- Swat. It would not only help to increase people confidence in federation, but would also deliver speedy and cheap justice to resolve issues without going through lethargic court justice system, which has totally failed to address peoples' grievances. Last but not least important aspect of Pashtunwali is its effect on bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The embracing of Pashtunwali would create a good-will in Pashtun majority areas, which would positively affect its relationship with Afghanistan and automatically kill movements for greater autonomy.

Keywords: Pashtunwali, Jirga, Terrorism, Siali, Constructivism, War on Terror, Extremism.

Introduction: This article basically analyses how Pashtunwali, which is a prominent culture in Pak-Afghan border region, could be turned into a geo-strategic asset in Pakistan. Pashtunwali is a tribal code of conduct in Pashtun majority areas that regulate their way of life. It is primitive value system that promotes egalitarianism, uniformity and resolution of dispute through Jirga system. Pashtunwali as a social structure creates three kinds of opportunities to improve relationship between the

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state and society in Pakistan and between Kabul and Islamabad. Pashtunwali as an alternate form of governance system that promotes speedy justice, egalitarian values and community service, if implemented in its true letter and spirit could create an ideal society in Pak-Afghan border region to fight extremism and terrorism. Secondly, it could also improve state and society relationship by ameliorating services delivery system especially delivery speedy and cheap justice as during the time of Wali-e- Swat. If the government properly uses the Jirga system, it would not only help to increase people confidence in federation, but would also deliver speedy and cheap justice to resolve issues without going through lengthy lethargic court justice system, which has totally failed to address peoples' grievances. Last but not least important aspect of Pashtunwali is its effect on bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The embracing of Pashtunwali would create good-will in Pashtun majority areas, which would positively affect its relationship with Afghanistan.

On the other hand, there is another perspective present in the international literature on Pashtunwali that it is a geo-strategic liability for Pakistan that affects its relationship with the United States and Afghanistan (Kugelman, 2018) (Johnson & Mason, 2008). They believe that Pashtunwali promotes terrorism and extremism, creating obstacle to mainstream Pashtuns in Pakistan, and develops mutual distrust with Afghanistan. They argue that Pashtunwali particularly turned into a geo-strategic challenge for Pakistan after the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 (Khan, 2019). They blame four decades of war in Afghanistan and flood of refugees from to Pashtuns majority areas as key factors in turning Pashtunwali into a geo-strategic problem for Pakistan (Saddique, *The Pashtun Question*, 2014). Johnson and Mason argue that war in Afghanistan since 1979 created a new social structure that was facilitated by Pashtunwali, which is encouraged ruthless bloodshed, rise of Islamic extremism and disenfranchisement of the Pashtun population in Pakistan. They say,

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).

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 (Wendt, 1992). This paper analyses

how Pakistan could use Pashtunwali, which is a social structure, to fight extremism and terrorism, increase confidence between state and society and improve bilateral relationship with Afghanistan. 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 (Wendt, 1992). 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) (Saddique, The Pashtun Question, 2014).

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) (Babakhel, 2018).

Improving Pak-Afghan Relation:

There are three issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan that have created an environment of mutual distrust, hatred and use of proxies against each other; terrorism, India use of Afghanistan to de-stabilize Pakistan and conditions of Pashtuns in Pakistan. If Pakistan properly utilizes Pashtunwali as social structure, it could address all the above issues and help to establish good relation between Kabul and Islamabad (Bangash, 2013). Pashtunwali, as an alternate form of governance system, is very effect in establishing state writ in Pashtun region through use of social order. Therefore, the British Government governed FATA through Federal Crime Regulation to give maximum power to tribal chiefs to ensure stability in their respective areas. These arrangements enabled tribal chiefs, who were well versed about their social and political problems, to address them effectively instead of a bureaucrat as political agent, who did not understand areas' social and political dynamics. These arrangements would not have produced power vacuum that were

exploited by terrorists to create mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Saddique, 2014).

On the other hand, there is a perspective in the literature that the presence of Pashtunwali in Pashtun's culture on both sides of the border has seriously affected the bilateral relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Johnson & Mason, 2008). They believe that, Pashtunwali, which is a strict code of life promoting conservatism, tribalism and gender inequality created a masculine society. According to them, Pashtunwali has also promoted extremism in Pashtun belt of Pakistan, which has strategically affected Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan. Johnson and Mason say in their article in "*International Security*" that FATA (Federally administered Tribal Areas), KP (Khyber Pushtunkhawa) and Baluchistan are the worst affected areas of terrorism because of the presence of Pashtunwali culture (Johnson & Mason, 2008). Various Schools, colleges and religious seminaries are destroyed in Pashtun belt (Ginsburg, 2011).

Pakistan lies in the middle of great powers like Russia, China and India. Pakistan and Afghanistan shares 2250 km long porous border. Great powers have always been intervening in the region to secure their political and security interest whether it was Great Britain in 19th Century, Soviet during the Cold war or US after 9/11. Pakistan and Afghanistan are located as geo-strategically important positions. Persian Gulf, 70% of oil is transported through all over the world, located near to Pakistan. In south is the Arabian Sea and in north is the Wakhan strip that is separating Tajikistan from Pakistan (Fair, 2009).

Durand line, the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, is settled in 1893 and Emir of Afghanistan, King Abdur Rahman opposed the British settlement of the border issue. This border line divided the Pashtuns living on both sides of the border. The Afghan government has always been critical of the Durand 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 Pushtunkhawa into Afghanistan to solve the weakness of the country and get access to sea through Gwadar (Singh, 2014).

Afghanistan was the first country in the United Nations that opposed the recognition of Pakistan due to Durand 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 of Afghanistan in 1970s at the time of separation of East Pakistan, known as Bangladesh, which profoundly affected the bilateral relationship (Kugelman, 2018). 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 (Bangash, 2013).

Pakistan's geo-strategic location is a curse due to intervention of great powers in the region and the unintended consequences of their rivalries. There are multiple players and new actors who have entered the region after 9/11. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 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 Mujahidin. 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 terrorism. Pakistan became dependent on the US aid and also sacrificed 70 thousand people (Gall, 2014). The US State department and the US think tanks realized it several times that war in Afghanistan could not be won without the help of Pakistan.

There is a fear in Pakistan's security establishment that it will again face massive security challenges from instability in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal from the region. 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 like 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 (Khan, 2019).

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 an agreement between them that terrorism and terrorists are their biggest enemy, therefore they need to work together to address the menace of terrorism and develop mutual trust in the war against terror (Kugelman, 2018).

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. Pakistan and Afghanistan should use Pashtunwali to fight against the rise of Islamic extremism, reduce rivalry between Pakistan and Afghanistan, encourage egalitarian society based upon Nang, Namos and Malmastia, and use Jirga to resolve bilateral issues. Pashtunwali, which is a liability at the moment, should be turned into an asset to improve bilateral issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan to defeat terrorist organizations like the Afghan Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISIS (Saddique, Pakistan Amends Constitution to Merge Tribal Region, 2018).

Conclusion:

Pashtunwali is a tribal code of conduct in Pashtun majority areas that regulate their way of life. It is primitive value system that promotes egalitarianism, equality and resolution of dispute through Jirga system. Pashtunwali as a social structure creates three kinds of opportunities to improve relationship between the state and society in Pakistan. Pashtunwali as an alternate form of governance system, if properly implemented in its true spirit could help to create an ideal society in Pak-Afghan border region in fundamental ways. Firstly, it is an effective social structure based on strong values to fight against extremism and terrorism. Secondly, it could also improve state and society relationship by ameliorating services system especially delivery of speedy and cheap justice as during the time of Wali-e- Swat. It would not only help to increase people confidence in federation, but would also deliver speedy and cheap justice to resolve issues without going through lengthy lethargic court justice system, which has totally failed to address peoples' grievances. Last but not least important aspect of Pashtunwali is its effect on bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The embracing of Pashtunwali would create good-will in Pashtun majority areas, which would positively affect its relationship with Afghanistan.

Pakistan and Afghanistan should use Pashtunwali to fight against the rise of Islamic extremism, reduce rivalry between Pakistan and Afghanistan, encourage egalitarian society based upon Nang, Namos and Malmastia, and use Jirga to resolve bilateral issues. Pashtunwali, which is a liability at the moment, should be turned into an asset to improve bilateral issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan to defeat terrorist organizations

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