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Areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Present Turmoil

A. Ghafoor Liwal*

Historical Background

Over the centuries Afghanistan has been used in the game of power politics by the Persians, the Mongols, the British, the Soviets, neighboring countries, global non-state actors and more recently the United States and its allies. But no outsider has ever conquered Afghanistan.

For Afghanistan to be at the centre of conflict is nothing new. From ancient times the Afghanistan region was believed to be the very centre of the world. The famous Indian poet Mohamad Iqbal Lahori described Afghanistan as the “heart of Asia” while Lord George Curzon, the British viceroy, called Afghanistan “the cockpit of Asia.”

The British made three attempts to conquer and hold Afghanistan, but failed. Consequently Afghanistan turned into a buffer state between Russia and Britain. Only the Afghans were capable of keeping two empires, Britain and the Soviet Union, at bay in the 19th century.

Then this country plunged into an intensified Cold War between the Soviet Union and the U.S., where after decades of confrontation between the two blocks communism was defeated with the support and dollars from the west and the blood of Afghans.

But then the world turned away from Afghanistan allowing civil war, ethnic fragmentation and polarization as a result of which it became a failed state. A power vacuum was created that was ultimately filled by the Pakistani and Saudi supported the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

While today the tribal areas that have remained partially independent have turned into a hub of terrorism where terrorists are recruited, trained and then used to destabilize the governments in the region.

Areas and Inhabitants between Afghanistan and Pakistan

Afghanistan and Pakistan share an immense border line stretching 2430 km along the southern and eastern edges of Afghanistan. This contains Afghan provinces of Badakhshan, Nurestan, Konar, Nangarhar, Paktiya, Khost, Paktika, Zabul, Kandahar, Helmand, and Nimruz that are adjacent to the Pakistani border. The Pashtun population and many of its tribal entities straddle the border. The frontier passes through different areas having sandy deserts in the south and rugged mountains in the east. The two main border crossings in the mountains between Afghanistan and Pakistan are the Khyber Pass, between Peshawar and Jalalabad; and, further south, the Khojak Pass, between Quetta and Kandahar. The line between the two countries was determined in 1893 in a controversial

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agreement between Afghan Emir Abdur Rahman Khan and the British Government of India. However, subsequent Afghan governments as well as the present government have not accepted and are against the so-called Durand Line, so an exact and clear border is still a matter of dispute and no official restrictions hinder individuals crossing from Pakistan into Afghanistan.

The Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, the majority of the Pashtuns lives across the border in Pakistan, and in these border areas also the inhabitants are Pashtuns that live on both sides of the Durand Line sharing linguistic, cultural, and traditional similarities. From ancient times, however, the national division between Pashtuns in Afghanistan and those in Pakistan has undermined the ethno-nationalist assertion of unity among all Pashtuns. This historical experience is often rejected or downplayed by ethnic nationalists, but it has become very significant. For example, Pashtuns in Afghanistan have been in control of the government for centuries and are considered to be the dominant ethnic group. In contrast, Pashtuns in Pakistan are a minority group in a larger population and sees themselves as politically and economically disadvantaged.

Durand Line

Afghanistan's frontier with British India was drawn by a British civil servant, Mortimer Durand, in 1893, while ambiguity lies on the agreement of this line as it is the most contested border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Imposed by British India in 1893 against the Pashtuns aspirations, the Durand Line divided the Pashtun tribes living in the area and gave the British control of regions that would later become Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP). After Pakistan's independence from Britain in 1947, Pakistani leaders assumed that Pakistan would inherit the functions of India's British government in guiding Afghan policy. When Afghanistan became fully independent in 1919, it accepted the line as its de facto border with British India. But soon after Pakistan's independence, Afghanistan voted against Pakistan's admission to the UN, arguing that Afghanistan's treaties with British India relating to Afghan borders were no longer valid since a new country was being created where none existed at the time of these treaties.

Successive Afghan governments have never fully recognized the Durand Line as the official boundary between the two countries, and have variously laid claim to parts of Pakistan's NWFP, Balochistan province, and FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) inhabited by the Pashtuns tribes that were used as a buffer by Britain while a special system of political administration was established in order to govern the freedom-loving Pashtun tribes who resisted colonial rule. That has been a source of constant tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Nature of the Region

The areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan have unique characteristics. These areas have been isolated from the rest of the world for centuries. It is because of this that its backwardness remains unchanged. The central government has always been weak in these regions as the nature of

the people is independent and freedom-loving.

The administrative system in tribal areas is totally different from settled areas. The entire tribal area on the other side is under the rule of a governor who acts as agent to the president for tribal affairs. Administrative affairs are conducted under the centuries-old British law called the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). The political agent has unlimited power; the whole agency is under his control and the monitoring of it is under very weak hands, which is why the lives of the tribal people are often considered as the most miserable as the laws over them are often very brutal and harsh.

Nature of the Inhabitants

The inhabitants of this area are Pashtuns who have a long history of independence. Pashtuns by nature are conservative, culturally established, traditional and peace-loving, but they live in an area that is the gateway to India, and throughout history, they were constantly invaded by others. They had to defend themselves, but they never attacked anyone and they never surrendered to anyone either.

Pashtuns believe in peaceful ways to solve problems that are either among themselves or outsiders, like back in 1930, instead of violent ways tens of thousands of Pashtuns tried a path of nonviolent civil disobedience against the Colonial British. This movement, called the Khudai Khidmatgar, or Servants of the God, united bickering tribes for an astounding 17 years to end British colonial rule.

But today they are passing through a difficult and dangerous time, as the Afghan title has been hijacked by those who do not really represent the interests and feelings of the Pashtuns. Today the Pashtun areas have turned into a blood theatre and these areas are used by terrorists as their training camps and serve for them as safe havens, their young children are used for suicide operations to kill innocent people and fulfil the designs of others.

Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) and Pakistan Policy towards these Areas

Until now we have seen that the Pakistani state cannot deliver what its masses especially Pashtuns have been demanding from the very existence of this state. It has never adopted a productive policy through which there can be confidence building talks with the tribal leaders and people. Its military is engaged in a dangerous and very complicated game with the Taliban in which some time there is support from its side and some time fights against it. The tribal as well as other masses that have been suppressed throughout the history are in total denial.

Giving this country more aid without any accountability, however, as the U.S. is proposing, cannot be the answer. Successive Pakistani governments and specially its intelligence agency as well as military have either diverted it to their unwinnable arms race with India, pocketed the aid themselves, or even worst, sent it covertly to the very terrorist groups America is fighting against. The U.S. at last needs to accept that Pakistan, in its current form, has failed in its targets and what it was required.

It is an artificial state that consists of different regions and a multitude of tribes. Officially, Pakistan consists of one large province (Punjab) which dominates three much smaller provinces that have been suppressed historically many times. Aid should therefore bypass the central government, and be dispersed directly to the tribes and the common people. No doubt, America will face a series of protests from the Pakistani state and military. But if the Pakistani armed forces are not willing to cut off ties with the Taliban and other militant groups as well as extremists, the U.S. should not feel restrained from exploring alternative avenues.

It is wrong to say that Pashtun ethnic nationalism has backfired against the U.S., the fact is that Pashtuns are finding themselves amidst another Great Game brutally fought between the more venomous and brutal as well as large number of competitors in which they are exploited, without any benefit to them or their land and the people are used for the designs of others.

The British during its reign devised a special legal structure called the FCR. Evolving through the late nineteenth century then the regulations were finally promulgated as statutory law under Viceroy Lord Curzon in 1901 and these brutal and centuries old laws that the British used to pressurize the tribes were later adopted by the Pakistani government that are still prevalent in the FATA region.

This unique set of laws called the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) enforced in the tribal areas empowers the government to arrest anyone without specifying the crime. Political activists and other humanitarian groups term the FCR as a “black law” because the accused cannot get bail, and often innocent people are taken into custody.

Successive governments in Pakistan have been promising to bring reforms in the tribal areas but to no effect.

Today human rights advocates and many other agencies as well as tribal intellectuals call for an overhaul of the law. They demand:

- 1) That the law should be in conformity with contemporary human rights standards;
- 2) Transfer of all the legislative as well as other powers to the discretion of the people of the region;
- 3) The system of collective punishment and territorial responsibility should be abolished;
- 4) Political as well as social and civic freedoms should be given to the FATA as it comes under their basic rights;
- 5) A well planned comprehensive program should be adopted for the disarmament and demobilization of illegal weapons in the region.

War Against the Soviet Union and Nurturing of Extremism

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan a strong resistance started in which the tribal networks of the region had a tribal *jihad* led by the tribes’ elders rather than an ideological *jihad* led by the Islamists. A massive resistance started against the Soviet Union, while in Peshawar there were seven parties recognized by Pakistan that received a share of aid from the U.S. pipeline through the Pakistan Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).

Prior to the war the extremism barely had a base in Afghan society, but with the money and arms from the U.S. pipeline and support from Pakistan these sorts of things gained tremendous clout. The Afghan traditional system was demolished and a new version of extremism was created by the ISI that fought each other mercilessly in which at last the traditional system was eliminated and the ground was paved for extremism, which came in the form of the Taliban.

The ISI and Pakistan's Jammāt-e-Islami set up reception committees and offices to welcome, harbor and train the arriving militants and then encourage them to join the extremist line that can be a useful tool to serve their interests. Thousands of foreign Muslim radicals came to study in the hundreds of madrassas that General Zia ul Haq's military government had established, most of them along the Afghan border.

These Taliban who considered themselves the cleansers and purifiers of society brought a new and different type of system with them. Many of them had been born in Pakistani refugee camps, where they received an extreme version of religious education in Pakistani seminaries, they had learned fighting skills from Mujaheddin parties based in Pakistan as well as from the Pakistan Army that was constantly supporting and equipping them with imported arms. They were kept ignorant of their history, traditions, culture and country.

They gave fundamentalism a new face and a new identity that refused any compromise or political system except their own.

By funding thousands of religious madrassas to the arming of local extremist organizations, Pakistan experienced a major transformation, it engaged in successive wars in and around Afghanistan like the Cold War struggle, the post-Cold War civil conflict, and then the "War on Terror," as a way of dealing with its basic national security threat "India."

9/11

Within hours of the attacks of September 11, 2001, Pakistan faced a very traumatic ultimatum issued by the U.S.: discard the Taliban, leave the extremism and fundamentalism support and become a close partner in the American-led War on Terror or face the consequences.

The then Pakistani military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, had no way but to succumb before the U.S. ultimatum and agreed to all American demands and conditions. The Taliban were discarded overnight and the U.S. was provided with every kind of assistance from bases to launching military operations against the people Pakistan once supported.

After 9/11 when the world scenario changed, immediately Pakistan's behavior changed due to American pressures but unfortunately it could not change its interests. In the beginning Pakistan asked for a moderate Taliban government in Afghanistan that would break with Al Qaeda. Although apparently Pakistan broke relations with the Taliban it covertly began to harbor and support terrorist groups.

When the coalition forces moved into Afghanistan in October 2001, the attack mainly came from the northern part of the country. The military rationale was to sandwich Al Qaeda and the Taliban and to completely block all exits. For the strategy to work, it was imperative to close the

borders to the greatest possible extent, but these borders were left open deliberately by the military establishment that had been forced to make a U-turn in its Afghan policy. The Taliban, foreign militants as well as Al Qaeda were welcomed and sheltered in these areas by their supporters in the military establishment.

Rising Terrorism in the Region

Currently the areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan are plagued by terrorism and violent extremist activities, these areas have turned into a hub of terrorism where terrorists are recruited, trained and then used to weaken and destabilize the regional governments. Not only local but international terrorist groups are considered to be present in these areas. In a sense these areas have turned into the headquarters of global terrorists and Al Qaeda. America of late has concluded that the hub of all terrorist activities emanate from the FATA regions that provide safe haven and sanctuaries to the insurgents and terrorist groups that operate against Afghanistan and coalition forces.

These areas have become safe havens for militant groups bent on exporting *jihad*. Foremost among them is the Taliban. Since October 2001, thousands of Taliban fighters, their leadership Shura (religious council) plus the masterminds of Al Qaeda are thought to be hiding in these areas.

The insurgency is taking place in a corridor alongside the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan across provinces like Konar, Nangarhar, Paktia, Paktika, Zabol, Kandahar and Helmand. These guerrillas as well as extremist elements cannot operate without the benefit of sanctuaries in Pakistan. While Islamabad argues that it cannot control a border without fencing it, though fencing the border is reckless and impractical, the fact is that most attacks are carried out in southern Afghanistan by Taliban coming from the Pakistan side.

Today schools are burned in Pashtun areas; for centuries these schools were operating but in the past few years, suddenly after 9/11, some groups emerged that are supported by different foreign agencies that started the destruction and annihilation of the youth particularly students both males and females whose schools are closed and threats have been issued to them by extremist forces. Restricting students from schools is a violation of children's human rights; this is very unfortunate that still in the 21st century many children are denied an education.

This war in the Pashtun areas is neither a tragedy nor an incident. It is a deep, wide reaching, hegemonic, evil, and well planned, foreign imposed conspiracy formulated and executed by an organized but very dangerous agencies that can be a big threat in the future to the world. It needs to be countered on an international scale.

Yet, the U.S. as well as the international community either remains ignorant, or it knows full well but chooses to act naive or uninformed. In any case, if the U.S. government as well as the international community does not take this matter seriously and it fails to drastically and completely revise its relationship with South Asian countries as well as its strategy in the War on Terror, these extremists and terrorists will continue to create political and military trouble and unrest in the region.

If Washington truly wants to save America and the world from the plight of terrorism, it must eradicate this plague at the root and settle the score with its founders and supporters. Otherwise,

this malignant cancer will spread far beyond the region and across the oceans.

With the false and foolhardy belief that the bombing and rocketing of a few mountains and valleys have finished off the terrorists, the U.S. and international community needs to implement a broad strategy that must focus on the original roots and training grounds for terrorism, beside that the eradication of poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy must be curbed as well.

The international community and international donors should come forward and consider the ideological, economic, political and geo-strategic interests of all those who are involved in this imbroglio. They should think deeply about the aspiration of the people who have been suffering from fear, terror, death and destruction for the last several years and are still suffering. The Pashtun belt that is the victim of terrorism and extremism, in the past had never faced such a dangerous, inhuman, unreligious activities; they have been living in peace with their own tribal structure and traditions for centuries and now some non-state militant organizations with an extreme version of ideology coupled with dangerous designs that are completely in contradiction with Pashtun traditions have taken grip of this belt that have given nothing except fear, terror, destruction, miseries and disappointment.

Pashtuns are Victim of Terrorism not Terrorists

The Pashtuns of Pakistan and Afghanistan are suffering from severe conflicts and violent brutal acts for the last three decades. As a consequence of the Soviet invasion and the Cold War, around 2.5 million Afghans, mainly Pashtuns, lost their lives and in similar numbers are still compelled to live with ruthless disabilities and many problems. After the Soviet invasion and their resistance, the clashes of warlords, then the rise and fall of the Taliban and now the War on Terror has caused the lost of thousands of lives, largely Pashtuns in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan. As a result of these conflicts and unrest the entire Pashtun belt is suffering. The FATA and Afghan bordering areas of Pakistan were termed as a “safe haven” for the terrorist and extremist forces many times. The presence of American and NATO forces in Afghanistan pushed these extremist forces back into these areas, which gradually spread over the whole province and as a result affected and damaged the social fabric of the Pashtun society.

The wrong media propaganda, global politics and its consequences on Pashtun land created the image of Pashtuns as terrorists and extremists while ignoring the long history of peace in this land. The Pashtuns are termed as the Taliban though they are fighting against them and are constantly suffering from this War on Terror.

This terrorist and extremist image of Pashtuns is basically part and parcel of the power politics that is played by the Pakistani establishment. The incident on September 11 provided a good opportunity for the Pakistani establishment and military, that was providing support to the extremists until the incident, once backed from it, using its media that portrayed Pashtuns as extremists.

Pashtuns have been killed by different groups. The Pakistani establishment has conducted certain operations, sometimes through the unmanned drones of the U.S. Also, they are targeted by Al Qaeda related groups like in Waziristan, and there was fighting between the local residents and Uzbeks that resulted in the killing of many people. Various operations have been conducted under

different names that were aimed to terrify and keep them backward. In the war on terror scores of Pashtuns have lost their lives and today this process continues.

This is very unfortunate that on one hand Pashtuns are used by different states as well as non-state actors for furthering their agendas and interests. On the other hand these Pashtuns in order to bring their own system back are fighting the Taliban, so on both sides Pashtuns are losing their lives.

The media should look at the realities. Most of the Pashtuns have been struggling and fighting extremism from the very beginning. It is tragic that the Pashtuns who themselves are victims of terrorism are portrayed as Taliban. This is damaging the anti-Taliban struggle initiated by the Pashtuns and now many actors are involved in this war. In this whole process it has been ignored that Pashtuns are neither extremists nor Taliban, but are being victimized by both sides.

Killing of Tribal Elders and the Demolishment of Their Traditional System

One of the main issues in the present war on terror in the tribal areas is that elders, prominent people and local leaders of the Pashtun tribes are deliberately targeted. Until now more than 500 tribal elders or maliks have been killed by commando action or by guided missiles. On the other hand, the local Taliban who are used by different agencies are also involved in this brutal act like these so-called Taliban who beheaded and killed many tribal elders by different names, while the security forces are targeting such elders and renowned personalities of the Pashtun tribes as suspected pro-Taliban miscreants. This is evident from the blasts that have occurred many times in the tribal jirgas and traditional systems in which only the elders and local tribal leaders participate for important tribal decisions. It seems so that there are deliberate attempts to target and threaten the tribal elders so that there would be no one to lead or guide the efforts for peace and reconciliation.

Pashtuns, Pashtunwali and Islam

Islam plays a very important role in the lives of Pashtuns. It is an important component of their identity but Pashtunwali is as influential as Islam among Pashtuns. Pashtunwali is an ethical code that is very inflexible by which all traditional Pashtuns abide; it has certain requirements like every insult should be revenged and every guest protected. For protecting his honor, his family, clan or tribe honor, a Pashtun is ready to sacrifice everything he has, his property, money even his life, for the slightest insult to him. In Pashtun there is a famous proverb, "He is not a Pashtun who does not give a blow for a pinch."

Pashtunwali is based on the collective wisdom of its people, it does not come from one authority and is therefore open to debate and re-interpretation according to the needs of the people and changing times. In a sense it is democratic and according to the wishes of the inhabitants. The majority of the Pashtun population belongs to the Sunni Hanafi religion, and they have been living for centuries with their own traditions and customs that were very respected and peaceful. But suddenly after the 9/11 attacks groups emerged that used their land and people for inhumane, un-

Islamic and anti-Pastunwali agendas. As a result, a reign of terror, killing and beheading started in these areas where all opponents that included tribal elders, politicians, and prominent people were brutally killed. Ultimately this peace and freedom loving nation was disgraced and presented to the world as terrorists though they are themselves the victims of terrorism.

There are Different People from Different Countries Involved in Terrorism

In the aftermath of the recent upsurge in the activities of terrorists in the tribal areas in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, U.S. military commanders perceive that a large number of extremists from Iraq, the Central Asian republics, Chechnya and the Middle East, as well as the local Taliban that have come from other provinces of Pakistan that are mainly Punjab, have joined together for the purpose to step up the fight against the Afghan government, the U.S., NATO and ISAF forces.

There is a mixed force of people from different countries and different nationalities like Chechens, Uzbeks, Uighurs from Xinjiang, Arabs, terrorists from the Central Asian republics and the Punjabis that are currently fighting in the tribal areas. Although they have different agendas and beliefs they have one enemy, like Uighurs and Uzbeks support Osama Bin Ladin's pan-Islamic ideology and advocates for an independent regional caliphate including one that should encompass Central Asia, Afghanistan and Xinjiang; having this belief or mission, however, at the same time they have not subsumed themselves with the other main groups like Al Qaeda.

These foreign terrorists that come from various countries are targeting different groups in the region and work against the governments while training the local Taliban. Uighurs are suspected of involvement in various explosions in which Chinese engineers were killed.

These groups came to this region because on the one hand the Taliban during their rule welcomed the entire foreign terrorist network to come and work for strengthening their government on the other hand Pakistan served as the safest route for foreign fighters to enter Afghanistan through its routes. Most of them come as tourists, businessmen and traders directly from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Algeria, Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and even from the Western countries.

The Pakistan military is claiming to have killed more than 200 foreign militants in periodic operations since 2002. The majority of these fighters were Uzbeks, Chechens and Arabs led by Uzbekistan Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) party leader Qari Thair Yuldashev, who survived the American bombing in the northern Afghan town of Kunduz in 2001. Senior Al Qaeda figures like Haitham al-Yamani, Abud Hamza Rabia, Muhsin Matwalli Atwah, Abdul Rahman, Abu Marwan al-Suri, the Pakistani establishment is claiming that these have been killed by them during the periodic campaigns against the militants.

Military Tactics Cannot be the Only Solution

Almost 80,000 troops have been deployed by the Pakistani government in the mountainous regions of the areas adjacent to the frontier line and various operations have been conducted in these

areas, but until now no significant improvements have been seen. Instead, terrorism has increased and militant militias have grown in the region. They are bringing more and more areas under their control and have strengthened their position. The Taliban, fundamentalists, extremists as well as their Al Qaeda ally that was thought once to be defeated in Afghanistan are regaining more strength, they have reorganized themselves and regrouped, are better equipped, tactically more sophisticated and better financed. They are more capable nowadays in creating obstacles and hindering the reconstruction and rehabilitation process in Afghanistan.

They have found safe haven among the people of the region because on one hand they are threatening and scaring the people through different tactics while on the other hand the international community as well as other organizations have also failed in providing the necessities and requirements of their lives. It is because the local population have been kept deprived there are no good political and economic reforms that could divert the attention of the people from violence and anti-Western sentiments but instead the fighting has been kept on boil, and that has been boosting anti-Western sentiments.

How to Win the Hearts of the Pashtuns

In this War on Terror and fighting in Pashtun areas external forces are involved whose support exists behind the drama, and it is also a fact that Pashtuns have been made key players in the international political and economic game where they have been used by different players.

No works in the education sector, low literacy ratios, scarce development funds, instability in Afghanistan and the rigid and oppressive policies of the Pakistani establishment have kept the Pashtuns backward.

The presence of international community and the U.S. should respect the history of the region, they should struggle for preventing all foreign hands in these areas, while Pakistan should be strongly told to shut down the breeding grounds for producing violent and extreme elements that they use to further their agendas.

The U.S. needs to win friends and allies in the Pashtun belt; unfortunately U.S. policies are doing the opposite. As often civilians are killed in operations as collateral damage but it backfires in resentment and results in strengthening the enemies in the region.

The history and nature of the inhabitants of the region shows that they would be willing to do things willingly if asked with respect and will backfire if ordered or threatened by force as we have witnessed during the 19th century during the British presence in this region. Missile strikes and bombing, cannot push them toward cooperation.

What the U.S. needs is to detach the inhabitants from Al Qaeda and the Taliban by positive approaches that work in favor of the inhabitants in almost all sectors. Serious and pragmatic steps should be taken in preventing killing and insecurity in these areas while development works should be done to bring them up to par with other regions.

The new U.S. administration has to define the right objectives in these areas, the predominant ethnic group that has always been alienated and oppressed by different foreign elements

should be brought back to the process in order to avoid further fatalities. For peace the U.S. and its allies need to engage Pashtuns where tribal lineage and pride runs deep in their psyche. Clearly, ignoring their tribal structure, traditions and affiliations could never bring peace and tranquility in Afghanistan.

Respecting their tribal system local Pashtun tribal chiefs should be gathered and motivated to work for shunning the path of violence and extremism, also their grievances must be addressed that is the main cause of unrest in the region. The reformation process should be boosted with a well planned comprehensive strategy and economic programs that are crucial for reinforcing reconstruction in the region.

A regional approach is needed for solving this problem that is a sort of headache for the whole world. All the regional countries especially Pakistan should be encouraged to adopt positive and constructive ways for advancing and protecting its interests. In regional forums like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), to counter regional problems like terrorism that are endangering the whole region, a collective approach should be adopted that is not limited just to words but include practical steps. Also the international community should adopt a comprehensive strategy for the region, especially those that lead to the path of prosperity, peace and tolerance towards their neighbors as well as to the world.

The international community as well as the U.S. should understand the regional complexities; they should respect the traditions of Pashtuns that are prevalent in those areas over the past centuries. Their religious, cultural and political values should be respected. Serious and pragmatic steps should be taken to prevent foreign elements and agencies from getting involved in the region and using Pashtuns as a tool for their illegal and inhuman agendas and missions.

Recommendations

- Taking into consideration the overall situation, the international community should work to reversing the whole situation that has emerged.
- Dialogue and negotiations are needed with the regional people; attempts should be made to understand their cultures, traditions and values, while their cultural, traditional, social, economic and political values should be respected.
- Pragmatic and practical strategy aimed at separating the Taliban and other armed groups like Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups should be adopted.
- A robust and practical strategies should be applied for curbing terrorism especially the global terrorist networks like Al Qaeda and IMU should be eliminated.
- The sense of deprivation that is fueling anger and resentment should be tackled by a comprehensive and well planned strategy whose main focus should be constructive works in the war-plagued regions.
- The harsh and brutal policies like FCR that are prevailing in that region should be abolished and new moderate policies that are in accord with human rights should be implemented.
- Funds should be allocated for the development of the Pashtun belt. These funds should be

monitored properly and given to the deserving people. Unemployment and poverty should be addressed, since these are important causes behind resentment.

- Work is needed in education and economic as well as civic sectors so that the attention of the people could be diverted towards construction.
- Building infrastructure should be given due consideration, such as roads, schools, hospitals, dams and agriculture.
- This issue should be brought in regional forums like SAARC and solutions should be found on the regional level as this menace is increasing day by day and is bringing more areas under its control.
- The media as a whole should look at the realities as most of the Pashtuns are victims of terrorism and are fighting terrorism but wrongly labeled as “terrorists.”