

Reevaluating Conventional Strategies: Harnessing Traditional Structures to Counter Violent Extremism in Pakistan

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Abstract

Civil-military relations constitute a complex area of international relations through the interaction of military institutions, civil society, and other governmental bureaucracies. Civil-military relations investigate the dynamics of engagement between the military and the general public, as well as the obligation of society to scrutinize the foreign and military strategies of the government. Traditional structures, including informal associations, ethical standards, and communal conventions, have played a pivotal role in Pakistan's efforts to quell violent insurgencies. These structures have substantially contributed to effectively eliminating extremist ideologies in cooperation with the military. The article explores the significance of a collaborative partnership between traditional structures and military organizations in combating insurgency and, ultimately, successfully eliminating terrorism. Three fundamental groups compose the traditional political system in Pakistan: the *Jirga*, the *Lashkar*, and the Clergy. Since 2012, this structure has been employed by the military across multiple tiers to suppress insurgencies, predominantly in the FATA, Swat region, Dir, and other districts where the authority of the state is at risk. The strategic alliance between the military and traditional structures is critical for combating insurgency.

Keywords

Traditional structures, counter violent extremism, Jirga, Lashkar, counterinsurgency, Pashtunwali

Introduction

Civil-military relations have been discussed for decades in international relations, with traditional structures playing a significant role. Throughout history, there has been a

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notable and direct engagement between civilians and the military and between kingmakers and guards. This interaction has led to several inquiries and discussions within the global political sphere about determining governance and establishing rules. These relationships offered both institutions the chance to collaborate to improve social circumstances. In certain instances, the aspirations and objectives of individuals may align under a common category, thereby facilitating the attainment of their intended purpose. The concept of civil-military relations refers to the complex dynamics between military institutions, civil society, and other governmental bureaucracies. Civil-military relations comprehensively examine the interactions between the military and society and the societal responsibility to observe government, foreign, and military policies. The efficacy of civil-military ties in mitigating violent insurgency has been demonstrated by implementing various measures.

Violent insurgency refers to the process of rationalizing and legitimizing acts of violence within ideological frameworks. It represents the violent expression of opposition to insurgent or extremist groups by individuals or groups that either support or oppose their cause. Such opposition is often rooted in various domains, including political and religious ideologies. To effectively counter insurgencies, both military and civilian leaderships employ a combination of formal and informal governance structures.

The three primary pillars of governance—the executive, legislature, and judiciary—constitute formal structures providing institutional governance and decision-making frameworks. In contrast, informal structures are traditional systems rooted in local customs and practices. These traditional structures have played a pivotal role in combating insurgencies in Pakistan by facilitating collaboration between military and civilian leadership.

Traditional mechanisms such as *Jirgas*, *Lashkars*, and the clergy have been integral to civil-military relations in addressing violent extremism. These structures, deeply embedded within local communities, have historically served as effective tools for conflict resolution and counterinsurgency efforts. Exploring how these mechanisms have been integrated into civil-military strategies in Pakistan and assessing their efficacy in addressing extremism remain critical areas of inquiry.

Traditional structures observe practices that include unofficial organizations, codes of conduct, conventions, ideals, and systems that keep society stable (Yamin, 2019). These conventional frameworks greatly assisted Pakistan in eliminating extremist ideas and insurgencies. These structures unite a particular tribe and facilitate the exercise of the writ of state among their tribal community. An instance of this can be observed in Pashtun society, where a set of guidelines is called ‘PashtunWali’ (Benson & Siddiqui, 2014) and it carries considerable prestige within the Pashtun tribe. It promotes cohesion among individuals and contributes to the establishment of societal norms and values. Informal structures of this nature are present in all regions and tribes of Pakistan, serving as advantageous assets when confronted with military or state aggression stemming from internal or external challenges.

The society of Pakistan is gravely threatened by violent extremism, which has further complicated matters of national security and stability. Approximately 70 thousand casualties have been attributed to violent extremism in Pakistan since 2001 (SATP, n.d.), placing the nation among the top five nations on the Global Terrorism Index (Vision of Humanity, 2023). These grim statistics underscore the pressing need for effective counterinsurgency measures. Studies have accounted for those traditional structures in counterinsurgency in Pakistan and found that these informal/traditional

structures, when coordinated with the military, play a significant part in effectively eradicating extremist beliefs within the country (Iqbal & Alam, 2020). For example, during Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014-2017), the military's collaboration with tribal *Jirgas* in North Waziristan enhanced intelligence-gathering efforts and facilitated the removal of insurgents from key territories.

This paper focuses on the importance of a cooperative relationship between traditional structures and the military in countering insurgency and the relationship between traditional structures and the military assist in effectively eradicating terrorism. Their assistance in identifying the specific regions where these ideologies are prevalent was invaluable, and their collaboration with the military was instrumental in establishing harmony in the area. The traditional political system in Pakistan comprises three fundamental groups: *Jirga*, *Lashkar*, and the clergy (Yousaf & FurrughZad, 2020). Since 2012, the military has utilized this structure at various levels during times of ongoing insurgencies, primarily in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region and other belts where the authority of the state is threatened. The military's strategic coalition with traditional structures is essential in countering insurgency.

This study also acknowledges limitations in its methodological framework. The research primarily relies on secondary data from policy papers, case studies, and reports on counterinsurgency operations. While these sources provide valuable insights, a lack of first-hand empirical data may affect the granularity of findings. Future research could benefit from fieldwork or interviews with stakeholders utilizing traditional counter-insurgency structures.

Conceptual Framework

Defining Insurgency

It is important to define 'insurgency' and set it apart from comparable terms like extremism and terrorism before diving into the frameworks. David Galula (2006) describes insurgency as a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, to attain specific intermediate objectives, finally leading to overthrowing the existing order. Organized political goals, frequently intended to undermine the state's legitimacy or sovereignty, are a component of insurgency. Usually, it incorporates political, social, and psychological aspects along with military operations.

Insurgency stresses a more comprehensive approach that exploits terrorism as one of many instruments, whereas terrorism frequently concentrates on using violence to accomplish ideological aims. The term 'extremism,' on the other hand, describes ideas that support drastic changes—not always through violence. For example, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militancy can be categorized as insurgency since it uses guerilla tactics and political subversion in addition to its stated objective of undermining state authority.

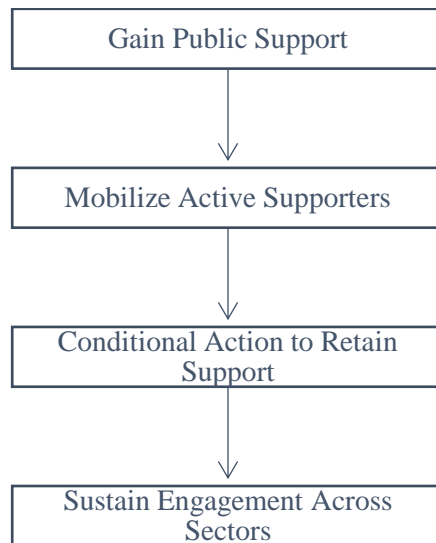
This paper examines the significance of collaborative relationships between traditional structures and the military in counterinsurgency through the lens of two theoretical frameworks. These include David Galula's 'Laws of the Coin' mentioned in his famous book 'Counter Insurgency Warfare; Theory and Practice' (Jacobs, 1964; Vrooman, 2005a), which covers the theoretical framework in four steps:

First, according to the laws of the coin, public support is necessary; the principal purpose of counterinsurgency is to gain support from the population. The second step is to motivate individuals prepared to offer full support in

counterinsurgency measures. This will allow them to organize and counterbalance the opposing minority more effectively. Third, once you have successfully gained the populace’s support, it is essential to establish that this support is conditional on the acts you take in the military. Your activities may lose this support if they are unpleasant to the population. The final point is that it is essential to consistently acquire and keep the public’s support in various sectors by utilizing an active minority (Reeder, 2016).

According to Galula, support from the population is necessary for counterinsurgency, and the engagement of minorities is how this support arrives. The implementation of these laws is a manifestation of Pakistan’s military policy to resist insurgency, which involves the utilization of traditional structures to eliminate dangers that disrupt the peace in the region and spread extremist ideas. This demonstrates how counterinsurgents modified their COIN strategy in response to the existing threat (Vrooman, 2005b). Through qualitative data derived from secondary sources, the research attempts to explain the role of traditional structures in working with the military to combat insurgency.

Figure 1. Galula’s Law of Coin



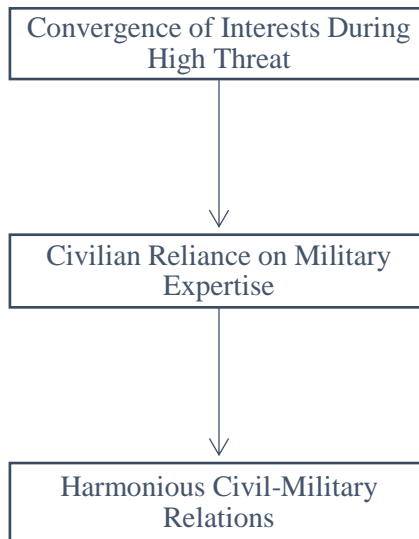
Source: Author

The second theoretical framework is given by Michael C. Desch, namely ‘Military, Civilian Preference in Response to the High External Threat’ (Desch, 1998). The author identified several conditions in which military and civilian preferences align in response to a significant external threat. The conditions are mentioned as follows:

- **Convergence:** Civilian and military leaders’ interests converge in response to the severe external threat, and each group is also likely to exhibit maximum cohesion.
- **Reliance:** When confronted with an external threat, civilians are more likely to depend on objective control mechanisms, placing their trust in the military’s exceptional combat capabilities.

- **Harmony:** In the presence of such a threat arrangement, civil-military relations tend to be harmonious.

Figure 2. Desch's Civil-Military Alignment



Source: Author

Pakistan took a diverse strategy for combating terrorism from 2012 to 2017, adopting several techniques to handle its complex security challenges (Sanaullah et al., 2021). A significant component of this strategy was the escalation of military operations directed at terrorist organizations active in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) region and the FATA (Vrooman, 2005b). Several operations, including Zarb-e-Azb in 2014 (Afzal, 2021) and Radd-ul-Fasaad in 2017 (“Pakistan Army Launches”, 2017). were carried out to disrupt militant networks and drastically reduce their capacity for effective operation.

In addition, the military strengthened its channels for sharing intelligence with non-traditional security structures (Sultan et al., 2024), including *Jirga* and *lashkars*, which helped in targeting the regions of tribal areas of Pakistan Legislative actions, such as the establishment of the National Action Plan (NAP) in 2014 (Ahmed, 2016), offered a comprehensive framework for combatting terrorism. This framework included efforts to curb radicalization and provide law enforcement agencies with additional resources. As an additional measure, Pakistan prioritized the improvement of border control along its porous border with Afghanistan.

This included the construction of border checkpoints and the installation of fences along the border to monitor illicit crossings and prevent terrorists from entering the country. The government of Pakistan has undertaken programs to prevent vulnerable populations from becoming radicalized and promoting moderate narratives as a means of combating radicalization.

In Pakistan, whenever there was a direct threat to the civilian population, this structure was followed throughout counterinsurgency operations. As a result, the civilian population was utterly dependent on the military. The military then used traditional structures to accomplish a common objective: eliminating insurgency movements from their territory and revitalizing societal peace.

Literature Review

There is an increasing recognition of traditional conflict resolution methods in the terror-stricken Pashtun tribal areas of Pakistan, previously known as the FATA (Yousaf & FurrukhZad, 2020). These peripheral regions, situated far from the governing center, have been particularly impacted by the rise of militancy in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region since 2001. The authors further explore the Pashtun cultural code of Pashtunwali, which encompasses the *Jirga* (Pashtun tribal council) and the *Lashkar* (tribal militia), and suggest that the evolving socio-political landscape and the emergence of the secular Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) pose a challenge to traditional structures and the patriarchal values of the Pashtun people, including tribal institutions such as *Jirgas*.

Yousaf (2020) analyzes the influence of Pakistan's postcolonial state structures and colonial legacies on the security and cultural dynamics of the Pashtun tribal areas, formerly known as FATA. He highlights the critical role of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly the *Jirga* while emphasizing the enduring impact of the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), a colonial-era legal framework. Yousaf contends that the military's dominance in shaping security policy and the continued reliance on colonial governance structures has negatively impacted the region's security landscape.

Yousaf further highlights the Pashtun community's independent initiatives to combat the escalation of militancy, emphasizing the need for constitutional reforms and the merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. He advocates integrating indigenous peacekeeping mechanisms like the *Jirga* to foster sustainable peace in South Asia. The work is a valuable resource for scholars of South Asian Studies, International Relations, Peace and Conflict Studies, terrorism, traditional justice, and restorative peace mechanisms, focusing mainly on northwestern Pakistan.

Furthermore, Khan and colleagues (2023) employ an experimental methodology to assess the effectiveness of counter-narratives in reducing the likelihood of violent radicalization. Using a randomized controlled study involving 150 participants, the authors evaluate the impact of various narrative constructs, such as counter-narratives, control stories, and explanations for terrorist attacks, on individuals' cognitive reflection and susceptibility to extremism. The findings indicate that enabling individuals to construct their counter-narratives is more effective than imposing generic substitutes.

Studies further suggest that the function of *Lashkar*, an ancient traditional *Pakhtun* structure, fosters harmony within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's conflict-affected communities. Information was gathered from 278 houses in four Dir-Upper and Dir-Lower Districts (Iqbal & Alam, 2020). A chi-square test was applied to determine the relationship between *Lashkar* and peace conditions. There was a significant correlation between the presence of *Lashkar* and regional peace, as evidenced by its functions of militant expulsion, authority maintenance, and local safety assurance. Nevertheless, no discernible correlation was found between government armaments and peace, nor *Lashkar's* status as a symbol of peace. According to the study, *Lashkar* protects communities from external aggression (Ahmad et al., 2020).

There are still several gaps in the literature, even though it offers valuable insights about Pashtunwali's traditional dispute resolution methods, the function of *Lashkars*, and the Pakistani state's changing counterinsurgency tactics. First, the cooperative relationships between the state's military machinery and traditional organizations like

Jirgas and *Lashkars* have received little scholarly attention. This makes comprehending how indigenous processes fit into contemporary counterinsurgency frameworks more challenging. Second, there is a lack of theoretical applications that could shed light on how these relationships are changing in response to current security threats because a large portion of the currently available research concentrates on historical and descriptive assessments. Finally, little is known about how socio-political organizations like the PTM influence the transformation of these established institutions.

By using David Galula and Michael C. Desch's theoretical frameworks to critically examine the relationship between conventional structures and state-led counterinsurgency tactics, this study aims to fill these gaps. By emphasizing this relationship, the study advances knowledge of hybrid counterinsurgency strategies and their potential for long-term peace in conflict-prone areas. This work also bridges the gap between theory and practice in counterinsurgency literature by promoting incorporating indigenous practices in contemporary security policy, which places it within the more extensive academic debate.

Civil-Military Strategy: Leveraging Traditional Structures to Counter Violent Extremism

During counterinsurgency operations beginning in 2012, the Pakistani army utilized traditional or informal institutions to foster peace in regions where extremist ideologies were prevalent. These structures were predominantly employed in the Pashtun belt of Pakistan, specifically in the FATA and Swat (Khan et al., 2019). In Pakistan, these traditional structures can be categorized into three primary groupings, as outlined below:

Jirga

In the tribal regions of Pakistan, the *Jirga* functions as a form of local court. The political agent, often called the *Sardar*, maintains law and order in these areas. The *Jirga* plays a crucial role in resolving internal disputes, fostering unity, and promoting collaboration within the community. It has been instrumental in formulating policies for FATA, mobilizing action, and facilitating restoration and rehabilitation efforts in the region (Spee et al., 2021). According to the principles of Pashtunwali, decisions within the *Jirga* are typically made through consensus. These tribal cultures predate the establishment of modern written or codified laws (Joh, 2000).

The *Jirga* system is primarily used to resolve disputes among the Pashtun people. However, it is also practiced, albeit to a lesser extent, among neighboring populations in Afghanistan and Pakistan that are influenced by Pashtun culture. Its primary aim is to prevent tribal warfare and maintain peace (Spee et al., 2021). Although younger individuals may attend *Jirga* meetings, only the more experienced community members hold the authority to resolve disputes or make decisions on critical matters.

Regarding local customs, decisions made within an equitable and accessible *Jirga* are generally reached by consensus. This system can potentially extend the state's authority within specific tribes. The military has leveraged the *Jirga*'s role, which has proven highly effective in countering violent actions. The roles of the *Jirga* are interconnected with various military objectives, as outlined below:

- i. **Local Support and Acceptability:** The *Jirga* has authority comparable to that of a court in tribal regions, and its leaders, including the Sardars, enjoy the direct support and approval of the tribal people. Given their significant influence over their communities, the military has enlisted the assistance of these tribal leaders to sustain informal structures (Ali, 2018). Through their support, tribal leaders can prevent their people from succumbing to the extremist ideologies propagated by violent organizations.
- ii. **Containing Organizational Recruitment:** Recruitment of new members is a key factor in sustaining the strength of violent groups. The success of these recruitment efforts is contingent on local support and acceptability, which the military has gained through the *Jirga's* involvement. By ensuring that the local population opposes violent ideologies, the military effectively curtails the recruitment efforts of insurgent groups (Akram & Tariq, 2024). This approach significantly disrupts the insurgents' ability to expand their influence.
- iii. **Population Containment:** The *Jirga's* influence over tribal communities has helped the military reduce the territories controlled by violent organizations (Irfan et al., 2022). The *Jirga's* authority has also contributed to the confinement of the local population within specific areas, making the activities of violent groups more visible. Being aware of the situation, the local population is better positioned to identify and report areas where extremism is taking root.
- iv. **Propagating a Counter-Narrative:** Extremist groups often develop a distinct ideology or narrative to justify their actions (Nawaz, 2011). In response, the military, with the support of the *Jirga*, propagates a counter-narrative that challenges the extremist ideology. The *Jirga*, through its influence, communicates to the local population that these groups are advancing extremist causes, which pose a direct threat to both the community and the state. This narrative is critical in counteracting the ideological influence of violent organizations.
- v. **Intelligence Gathering:** Being intimately familiar with the dynamics within their communities, the local population plays a vital role in identifying individuals and locations involved in violent activities. This local knowledge facilitates the gathering of intelligence, which is crucial for the military in preemptively thwarting planned attacks and insurgent operations. The *Jirga's* connection with the community aids in timely disseminating information regarding potential threats (Khokhar et al., 2014).
- vi. **Logistical Support:** The military has disrupted the logistical networks that sustain insurgent groups with the assistance of traditional structures such as the *Jirga* (Otero-Bahamon et al., 2022). Violent organizations rely on a steady supply of resources, including food, weapons, and other essential materials. With the cooperation of local communities, the military can trace and block these supply lines, effectively hindering the insurgents' operational capabilities.

Demoralization of Extremist Groups

The aforementioned steps are interconnected and collectively contribute to the demoralization of extremist groups. The disruption of their recruitment efforts, logistical support, and ideological narrative, combined with the strategic containment of their activities, significantly weakens their organizational structure. This demoralization is a critical factor in diminishing the influence of violent groups and preventing their expansion.

By utilizing these traditional institutions, the military has strengthened its counterinsurgency efforts and created a more resilient and peaceful environment in regions affected by extremism.

Lashkar

The term *Lashkar* refers to a group of militiamen employed by *Jirgas* to protect their tribes. These militias are responsible for safeguarding the inhabitants of their tribal communities and operate under the laws and regulations established by the *Jirga* leaders. The term *Lashkar* is derived from Persian, meaning ‘army’ in English. These informal militias are trained in various combat techniques to defend their people, their tribes, and, in some cases, the state (Yousaf, 2020). During periods of conflict, particularly when the state faces well-established threats within tribal regions, the military utilizes the *Lashkar* to support its objectives. Its role becomes particularly significant when employing traditional structures to combat insurgency and achieve strategic goals.

Originally established to protect local communities, the *Lashkar* serves in an essential capacity. For example, before the direct intervention of the Pakistani army in FATA, local communities sought protection from the Taliban. In response, individuals were recruited into the *Lashkar* to ensure the safety of their people from Taliban influence (Yousaf, 2020). This arrangement can be seen as a barter system, with the protection of families in exchange for service in the *Lashkar*. The military has employed the *Lashkar* in the following capacities:

- i. Awareness of Local Territory:* A critical advantage of the *Lashkar* is their intimate knowledge of local terrain. During operations like Zarb-e-Azab, *Lashkar* militiamen assisted the Pakistani army by identifying the locations of extremist groups. A similar dynamic was observed during the Vietnam War, where local fighters utilized their knowledge of the land to outmaneuver foreign forces. In Afghanistan, the Taliban’s superior understanding of the territory enabled them to gain the upper hand over foreign forces (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023). Thus, the military’s collaboration with the *Lashkar* was instrumental in identifying the locations and movements of violent extremist organizations.
- ii. Easy Identification:* Skilled in combat techniques, *Lashkar* members could infiltrate militant groups and act as spies. Their primary role was to inform the state or their *Jirgas* about insurgent activities and policies (Perlez & Shah, 2008). This capability proved particularly beneficial during the Zarb-e-Azab operation, where *Lashkar* militiamen provided crucial intelligence on insurgent movements.
- iii. Local Protection and Support:* The primary function of the *Lashkar* is to protect their communities. By leveraging their combat skills, they help safeguard their tribes, thus alleviating some of the burden on the state and military forces. In this regard, the *Lashkar* is collaborative in ensuring peace and stability. Their knowledge of defense tactics allows them to protect state institutions, making them valuable allies in counterinsurgency efforts.

Clergy

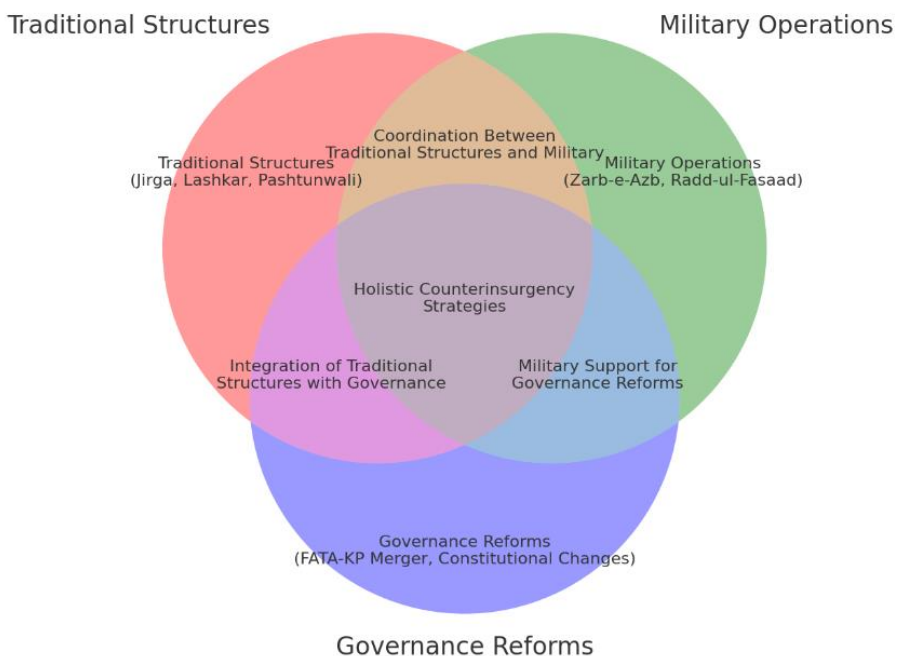
As traditional religious authorities, the clergy play a pivotal role in their communities. Their functions vary across religious traditions but generally involve overseeing rituals, teaching religious doctrines, and guiding followers in matters of faith. In the context of

counterinsurgency, the clergy can be instrumental in challenging the extremist ideologies propagated by militant groups, particularly when these groups misuse religious teachings to justify violence.

The Pakistani military has engaged the clergy to combat the false narratives of extremist beliefs advanced by religiously motivated insurgent groups. Clerics, due to their social acceptability and religious authority, are uniquely positioned to issue fatwas, especially when extremist organizations promote a distorted version of jihad. These fatwas help prevent the spread of misleading ideologies and counteract extremist propaganda. A notable example occurred in 2012 following the Taliban’s attack on Malala Yousafzai. In response, the ‘Sunni Ittehad Council,’ consisting of fifty Muslim scholars, issued a *Fatwa* denouncing the Taliban’s actions and labeling their interpretation of jihad as misguided. This fatwa emphasized that ignorance was the driving force behind the Taliban’s distorted worldview (Boone, 2012).

By leveraging the influence of traditional institutions like the *Lashkar* and the clergy, the Pakistani military has been able to challenge extremist ideologies, enhance local security, and foster peace in regions affected by insurgency.

Figure 3. Interplay Between Traditional Structures, Military, and Governance in Counterinsurgency



Source: Author

Limitations: Military Use of Traditional Structures in Counterinsurgency

The military’s approach to including traditional structures in the Counterinsurgency operation is beneficial and effective (Hensen,2024). The organization consistently achieves success in delivering intelligence regarding vulnerabilities in the insurgents’

strategies, which the military effectively employs to counteract these violent factions. The state has also witnessed severe repercussions of traditional structures, which may be regarded as constraints of involvement of these informal institutions, that occurred as soon as the operation was effective and ended. Early on, after the conclusion of counterinsurgency operations, the following are some of the limitations that were observed in the tribal areas:

Tribal Hostilities

During and after the operational phase of conflicts, tribal leaders can utilize their authority against one another in their tribal enmities (Searcy, 2023). This occurs when tribal leaders misuse their power against their opposing tribe, which results in more turmoil in the tribal lands.

Personal Inclination

This limitation can be understood with patron-client relations. The state gives power to local leaders, and they use this power as patronage to achieve their interests by supporting their community and family. Moreover, in the name of tribal leadership, they gather much money for their interests, promoting more poverty in their tribal areas, and no one can challenge their orders.

Political Inclination

In addition to soliciting most of their funds from the people, tribal leaders gain support by serving the community's best interests. They can exert influence over their political authorities through their economic might. After gaining enough power, informal structures can threaten the writ of the state by demanding a state within a state since they have enough authority provided by the state to do so.

Clerical Manipulations

Through manipulation of leadership choices and, in certain instances, the expression of orthodox ideas on a societal problem, clerics can influence such decisions. An illustration of this may be seen in the case of Sufi scholar Muhammad from Swat (Ali, 2013), when the state utilized him to initiate negotiations with the Taliban on behalf of the government. However, upon his return from the meeting, he contested the state's writ by asserting that the Taliban was proceeding in the correct direction by advocating for Shariah law. This ideology is intrinsically linked to religious doctrines.

Deviation of Lashkar and Easy Arms Accessibility

If not utilized effectively post-conflict or post-operation, *Lashkar* could potentially transform into a violent group. When it came to the mujaheddin, their initial objective was to combat the Soviets; however, they subsequently emerged as a menace to the State. Additionally, the simple availability of arms to the *Lashkar* and tribesmen may pose a threat, given that the state provides them with firearms for protection, which they may later employ in acts of ethnic violence.

Conclusion

Incorporating traditional entities like *Lashkars*, *Jirgas*, and religious authorities into counterinsurgency strategies illustrates the importance of utilizing these methods to

tackle intricate insurgencies in conflict zones. These systems, firmly entrenched in the cultural and historical contexts of Dir, FATA, and Swat, are crucial in promoting local acceptance, collecting intelligence, restricting recruitment possibilities for insurgents, and disseminating counter-narratives. Their capacity to connect local populations with state institutions highlights their significance in counterinsurgency operations, where legitimacy and trust are essential for success. As traditional justice systems, *Jirgas* facilitate conflict resolution, restore order, and foster peace within local communities. Their incorporation into counterinsurgency plans guarantees that operations are executed with the approval of residents, reducing resistance and improving collaboration. *Lashkars*, as informal militias, provide localized security and assist in intelligence collection while undermining insurgent groups. Religious authorities, such as clerics, engage by confronting extremist ideology, issuing fatwas against militant organizations, and advocating for narratives of moderation. These traditional structures collectively improve the operational efficiency of counterinsurgency techniques and offer a culturally sensitive response to insurgencies.

Nonetheless, the employment of conventional frameworks is fraught with difficulties. Tribal conflicts, personal and political influences, clerical manipulation, and potential deviation within *Lashkars* provide considerable weaknesses. These characteristics may undermine the efficacy of conventional methods, potentially converting them into sources of instability rather than tools of peace. The potential for *Lashkars* or tribesmen to transform into violent factions directly threatens national security and compromises counterinsurgency initiatives. The improper use of religious authority or political involvement can undermine the goals of these traditional systems, resulting in fragmentation and diminished public trust. To address these limitations, a comprehensive strategy is necessary to manage risks and optimize the potential of traditional institutions. This involves promoting openness, improving accountability, and assuring the integration of conventional procedures within a comprehensive framework of state-led governance. Establishing safeguards prevents misuse of these systems while ensuring their conformity with national security objectives.

The findings of this study underscore the imperative for a hybrid counterinsurgency strategy that integrates contemporary military capabilities with culturally grounded approaches. This method recognizes the socio-political dynamics of conflict-affected areas and utilizes the advantages of both traditional and formal institutions. These practices improve the operational efficacy of counterinsurgency initiatives and promote enduring stability by tackling the fundamental causes of insurgencies. The partnership between the military and conventional institutions guarantees that local communities see representation and security, thereby diminishing the allure of insurgent ideology. A culturally attuned and flexible counterinsurgency plan is crucial for tackling the intricacies of contemporary insurgencies. When employed successfully, traditional structures are potent instruments for connecting local communities with governmental institutions. Integrating these methods with effective state-led policies enables the mitigation of violent extremism, safeguarding of at-risk populations, and establishment of sustainable peace in areas afflicted by insurgency.

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