

Protracted Social Conflict in the Globalized World: The Case of Newly Merged Tribal Districts (NMTDs) in Pakistan

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Abstract

The 'Newly Merged Tribal Districts' (NMTDs) of Pakistan have been a historic conflict zone. The area was dragged into protracted social conflict (PSC) once again after Pakistan joined the US in the global war on terror (GWOT). Successful military operations and border fencing between Pakistan and Afghanistan have significantly restricted activities of militancy and terrorism in the region; however, a significant problem in conflict management is foreign intervention and lack of development in the social sector in the region. The present study aims to explore the nexus between economy and governance, and its contribution to PSC, in the case of the NMTDs. It attempts to build a cross-sectional theoretical construct of structural realism, capitalism, globalization, and PSC by Edward Azar. The concept of PSC emphasizes that lack of governance and international linkages are predominating factors in PSC. The study identifies the absence of central power in the international system allowing foreign intervention in the region while using tools of globalization; thereby, in the context of NMTDs, beneficiaries of conflict generated the war economy. It further argues that the lack of development in the social sector and slow rehabilitation process in the region can undermine sustainable peace.

Keywords

NMTDs, FATA, Pakistan, Capitalism, Regionalism, Globalization, Structural-Realism, PSC.

Introduction

Erstwhile FATA has been recently merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan to bring the people of the region into mainstream. On 31 May 2018, the President of Pakistan assented FATA merger with KP based on the 25th Amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan (e.g., Waseem, 2018). The region was subsequently named 'Newly Merged Tribal Districts' (NMTDs). Although the Government authorities have officially announced the merger, the complete (re)settlement of provincial government functionaries are likely to take place in a few years (owing to limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and the ongoing post-conflict

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rehabilitation and reconstruction processes). Historically, the NMTDs, along with the Afghanistan region, has been a battlefield for outside ‘invaders’ fighting against the local inhabitants. However, none of these invaders could sustain their rule due to massive clashes with local tribes, and therefore, the region came to be popularly known as the ‘graveyard for empires’ (Bearden, 2001). The recent wave of terrorism in Afghanistan and NMTDs is also primarily an outcome of US intervention in the region, against the backdrop of 9/11 (Morgan & Woosley, 2009). Since 2001, both Afghanistan and the NMTDs became conflict zones with sporadic attacks by security forces and the Taliban alike. This thrust the region into PSC. With regards, several studies have elucidated the structural determinants of the violent conflict in the region, along with other regional dynamics. However, there is still a need to explore the link between the psychological and socio-economic factors that continuously nurture conflict in the region. This research explores these various facets of the PSC in the NMTDs, in the light of the connection between Structural realism, capitalism and globalization. It commences with an inquiry of the casual relationship between capitalism and conflict, and extends this understanding to the role played by these in the context of the NMTDs. Following this, the research explores a similar link between globalization and conflict. This causal relation is also extended to the context of the NMTDs. The causal link between Structural realism and conflict is similarly explored in the context of NMTDs. The study then brings together these three concepts to elucidate their complementary roles in the generation and protraction of conflict in the NMTDs in Pakistan. It links this conflict to the several domestic and international factors and concludes with recommendations in the light of theoretical considerations and primary findings.

Relationship between Capitalism and Conflict

The causal link between capitalism and conflict can be traced back to the evolution of the various ideologies that have governed the global market system. The Classical school of thought argues that all human beings have self-interests that generate economic competition. Such competition fosters proficiency, and thus brings economic prosperity to society (Smith, 1776, p. 96). In view of this, capitalism and structural realism generated debate over its negative outcome of classes of ‘rich and poor’ and ‘societies and states’. The outcome is well feared by the Marxist approaches, which tend to explicate that the capitalist/bourgeoisie and proletariat, are in a state of clash over productive forces. Similarly, the Communist manifesto highlights capitalism as “a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (Marx & Engels, 1848, p.15). It stresses that this economic system of capitalism is not consistent and hence would get replaced by Communism through social revolution (Ibid, p. 46).

The theory of capitalism and the free-market has benefited the developed world immensely. Business organizations (especially from the first world), use this ideology as a rationale to expand their businesses in other countries, thereby affecting local markets. The contemporary dominance of capitalism came about as a result of the failure of the post-WWI environment, which fostered mercantilism and military expansion (Frieden, 2012). The rapid expansionism led to a state of global insecurity, eventually leading to the Second World War the victors of the war, the USA and her allies, reasserted the foundation of the sustainable liberal international economy, which extended to the broader socio-economic and political domains. The followers of such liberal policies argue that the economic interdependence promoted by the free

market system has led to the minimization of the possibilities of conflict between states (Keohane & Nye, 1973).

However, evidence suggests that such liberal policies have given rise to a new form of conflict. While liberal organizations do favor business opportunities, they produce significant inequalities (e.g., Stein, 1979; Buckman, 2004). With regards, scholars have well identified the relationship between such ideologies and underdevelopment, inequalities and violent conflict (see, e.g., Deneen, 2019). In addition to private businesses, other international financial institutes (such as the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and World Bank) have been repeatedly criticized for their policies. These policies compromise the sovereignty of host states, under the guise of free-market economy (e.g., Azar, 1990).

The Link between Capitalism and Conflict in the NMTDs

The NMTDs have remained deprived in terms of socio-economic development and socio-spatial/political inclusion. This exclusion can be attributed to the imposition of the Frontier Crime Regulations (FCR). The draconian of Frontier Crime Regulations (FCR), authoritative powers of a Political Agent (PA), and local *Malak* system significantly contributed towards maintaining the centralized power in the tribal region. (Mumtaz, 2016). Consequently, the broader public was excluded from any political participation in the real sense, considering the electoral system in NMTDs was not as per the rest of the country. It is also essential to understand that the (social) justice system was exclusively practiced through the indigenous *Jirga*. Although the Jirga system has widely been acknowledged as an effective indigenous mechanism of local dispute resolution, nevertheless there are significant power dynamics attached to the practice itself (Mehmood & Mir, 2019) which eventually contributed to PSC. These dynamics need to be explored in more detail. In this regard, the events surrounding 9/11 offer one point of departure.

The conflict emerged after the 9/11 terrorist incident and the USA's call for Pakistan to join the war against terror. This included clearing the NMTDs from the Taliban (Musharraf, 2006). The local population was generally involved in extra-legal economic activities, and only a few had stable jobs. Since it was an under-developed and less governed region, the militants were successful in mobilizing the locals to join militancy. The militants' success was also due to the state's neglect of the NMTDs since 1947; it had let the locals live according to their customs and traditions (KP Planning Department, 2019).

The economy of the areas has been similarly overlooked. Geological surveys have identified reserves of economically valuable minerals like copper, coal, limestone, chromite, lead, barite, soapstone, gypsum, marble, dolomite, emerald, and manganese in many parts of NMTDs. These sources of useful minerals have not been adequately explored, in part because of the government's disregard of the region and in part because of ongoing violence and militancy. These natural resources can be exploited for the betterment of the region and its people (Ali, 2018). Health care has also remained limited to major community centers. Therefore, people had to travel long distances to reach out to health facilities. As per one survey, there is only one doctor for every 7800 people, and only one health care facility for every 4200 people (Butt, 2015; Mehmood & Mir, 2019). Primary school enrolment for children is 52.1% as compared to 65% for the rest of Pakistan. Similarly, women are at an alarming disadvantage in terms of literacy rate (7.8%) as compared to men (45%) in the NMTDs (Bureau Report, 2016; KP Planning Department, 2019). The judicial system is also lacking. The FCR denies people of NMTDs, the right to defend against arrest,

detention, the prohibition of torture for extracting evidence, citizenship equality, and protection of property rights (Ali, 2018).

The lack of access to necessary facilities, unemployment and lack of education, health facilities, communication infrastructure, government services and limited source of income in the community, all compounded the deprivation in the region. It allowed the transition of the peaceful community into violent social mobilization, because they had nothing at stake and were already used to war-fighting owing to the previous Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Khalid Afridi, personal Commanders to extract maximum monetary benefits by using local youth in armed fighting against security forces.

The Taliban Commanders, associates, and supporters in the chain availed monetary benefits through extortion, kidnapping for ransom, donations in the name of *Jihad*, and hence continued militancy in the region (Fawad Orakzi, personal communication, May 24, 2020). Since the youth of the NMTDs had limited access and exposure to the rest of the world, it was conveniently subverted in the name of religion, martyrdom, and going to heaven upon suicide. The foregoing, capitalism attracted the beneficiaries of the conflict who were keen on maintaining and expanding conflict in the NMTDs.

Globalization and Conflict

Capitalism, technological development, and hegemonic aspirations contributed significantly to globalizing the world. There is, however, no single definition of Globalization. Giddens (2013) explains “Globalization can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (The Globalizing of Modernity, para 2). Similarly, “globalization represents the triumph of a capitalist world economy tied together by a global division of labor” (Holten, 2011, p. 21). Both pro and anti-globalization arguments are convincing. Hence both views are still under the social sciences debate. While globalization has indeed shrunk the world, it is not without demerits.

The dark side of globalization has been utilized by the powerful states’ machinery and international organizations alike. The absence of a central authority at the international level has allowed the expansion of hegemonic governance, propagation of ideologies serving vested interest, and accumulation of resources, which allows father leverage for powerful states like the US. Unjustified intervention under the guise of the elimination of the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the elimination of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan are clear examples of the misfortunes of globalization. Additionally, the foremost outcome of globalization is the increasing gap between rich and poor. As per UNDP, the economic wealth ratio between rich and poor countries was 3:1 in 1820, and in 1992, it reached 72:1 (Buckman, 2004). All of these factors contribute to PSC.

The cons of globalization result in hate, extremism, anger, and even terrorism. The anti-Islamic cartoon crises erupted in most of the Muslim world soon after it was published on 30 September 2005 in Danish Jutland Newspaper (Anderson & Luchau, 2011). Globalization has also created a certain loophole in the global legal framework. One example is the establishment of Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq where US soldiers tortured and sexually abused the suspects in the name of restoring the rule of law, democracy, and freedom to the people of Iraq (Gordon, 2006). Beside global terror, the disappearance of politics, division of classes, creation of insecurity, uncertainty, security dilemma, and structural realism is the dark side of globalization.

While Neo-liberal arguments may argue otherwise³, international organizations such as the United Nations responsible for ensuring peace in the world could not deliver effectively and rationally due to the dominance of big powers in the decision-making process of the UN in their favor. Air bombing, drone attacks, and occupation of ground forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, after the September 11 attacks by NATO allies and US faced no resistance from the UN to cease collateral damage and resolve the issue through peaceful means. The issue with globalization, therefore, is that big powers take all the benefits and weaken the social fabric of weaker states in the global world.

Globalization and Conflict in NMTDs

Underdeveloped countries consider themselves deprived due to all advantages of globalization and free-market moving uni-directionally towards rich countries. The conspiracies regarding the hegemonic design of the West especially the USA, interventionism through direct or indirect means, extraction of natural resources, and enforcement of westernization or Americanization over globalization leads to mistrust, unrest, anti-American and anti-western sentiments. While the 9/11 attacks were considered an act of terrorism by Al-Qaeda network, the communities with radicalized views tend to organize violent social movements (such as Al Qaeda) with the logic of war against foreign intervention. The majority of the society of NMTDs openly supported anti Americanization drive and waged war against the USA and those who were thought to be supporting the USA in GWOT. The profiteers and beneficiaries jumped into the conflict by siding with the conflicting parties according to their vested interest.

It was a stiff threat from the then US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage joins the GWOT, the then President Musharraf decided to join the USA in the interest of the state however faced tough resistance in the NMTDs region as people with radicalized mindset had already decided to wage war against the USA and Pakistan in GWOT (Musharraf, 2006, p.222).

Foreign fighters (such as Uzbeks) also joined the Taliban in the NMTDs region to fight against security forces. The Taliban in the funding, subversion, training, directing, and maximization of terrorism used the tools of globalization (Binnie & Wright, 2009). The same globalization enabled the swift intervention of the US and allied forces in Afghanistan. Similarly, Pakistan siding with the US in GWOT deployed security forces in the NMTDs region. Hence, all sides engaged in the conflict harnessed the tools of globalization in one way or another. The near to real-time footages of bombing and casualties were spread through tools of information technology to the global world (Putra, 2016, pp. 2-4). The Al-Qaeda and like-minded militants of other organizations took advantage of tools of globalization by swiftly connecting through their associates in most parts of the world, successfully developing anti Americanization narratives, and attracting individuals from other countries to join militancy in Afghanistan and NMTDs region. Hence, the NMTDs region was directly affected due to the US-allied countries' intervention in

³ See for e.g. Harvey. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

Afghanistan, the Indian intervention in NMTDs, and the existence of safe havens of foreign militants resulted in PSC in NMTDs, all within the prism of globalization.

Structural Realism and Conflict

Classic realism elucidates international politics as based on human nature, therefore subject to emotions and ego of international leaders. However, Structural or Neo-Realism deviates from Classic realism and posits that emotions and ego do not determine behavior. It instead proposes structural limitations as the primary source of the behavior of states in international relations. The world operates without a centralized authority, therefore, in the international system, every state is sovereign and takes decisions rationally in its own interest (Mearsheimer & Alterman, 2001) The absence of centralized authority has led to anarchy in the international system, and thus causes conflict. Such an international system is continuously affected by the change.

Within a system changes take place all the time, some important, some not. Big changes in the means of communication and warfighting, for example, strongly affect how states and other agents interact. Such changes occur at the unit level. In modern history, or perhaps in all history, the nuclear era, international politics remains a self-help arena. Nuclear weapons decisively change how some states provide for their own and possibly others' security; but nuclear weapons have not altered the anarchic structure in the international political system (Waltz, 2000, p. 5).

Structural realism, therefore, posits a security dilemma in the international system (Wunderlich, 2007, p. 18). The sovereign states acquire defensive mechanisms to safeguard against international intervention. However, their behavior comes across as an offensive mechanism, since this leads to an increase in their power relative to other states. This off-sets the offensive military capability of foreign interventions. It is due to this reason that states are never sure about the intentions of other states. This results in a lack of trust and the possibility of losing relative power that threatens the survival of the weaker state. The insecurity due to structural realism, thus leads to the expansion of military capability from defensive to offensive capability for interventionism, causing international security dilemmas. This suggests that "the international political system is anarchy, which is to say that its principal defining characteristics are the absence of overarching government" (Buzan, 2008, p. 128).

The defining feature of states is their sovereignty, or their refusal to acknowledge any political authority higher than themselves. Thus, the essential character of states defines the nature of the international political system, and the essential character of the political system reflects the nature of the states. If the units are sovereign, their system of association is anarchy, and if the system is anarchic, its members must reject the overarching government (Buzan, 2008). The security dilemma, therefore, causes an increase in military spending by encouraging large armies and high technological arsenals around the world. For example, because Pakistan fears a security threat from India, and has fought three wars in the past (besides limited conflict and skirmishes at the line of control), it keeps a minimum deterrence level to thwart against aggression. On the Indian side, the state feels threatened by China and raises its military budget to defend against any aggression

from China, and counter any threat from Pakistan as well. China is wary of a threat from the USA and keeps the army large enough to retaliate in case of any offensive. Similarly, the USA continues to expand its foothold all over the world by holding military bases and gaining a qualitative and quantitative edge over others so that no country in the world can come to challenge its military capability. Due to such international anarchy, the big powers intervene in other countries' affairs directly or indirectly to maximize their own defensive and offensive capability. Hence, the spiral of insecurity continues to get complex resulting in PSC.

Correspondingly, the behavior of the state is also greatly influenced by its pattern of linkages within the international system. In the world of globalization, two important international factors influence the behavior of states domestically. First is the level of economic dependency of the state on the international economic system. The level of dependency affects the level of the sovereignty of the state. Economic dependency and development affect the security needs within the state. The alteration in economic patterns due to the international economic system results in the realignment of a coalition of international capital and distorts economic policies within the state. The second linkage is political and military considerations in the international system. PSC occurs when communities are deprived of the satisfaction of their essential needs based on their communal identity. This deprivation is the result of a complex causal chain involving the role of the state and the pattern of internal linkages.

In explaining such military and security considerations in the international system, Pape (2003) has deviated from the term international linkages and derived the term *foreign intervention*. Addressing the problem of suicide terrorism, he holds that the level of foreign intervention, the difference of religion between the foreign state intervening and the local state, the level of nationalism within that community, and mass support to martyrdom leads to suicide terrorism. Pape (2003) suggests that offshore balancing should be the best strategy for the USA, considering that despite being a superpower, it has its limitations.

Structural Realism and Conflict in NMTDs

The social fabric of NMTDs was greatly affected by Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 as most populations conceived as a threat to their sovereignty, and thus decided to join hands with the people of Afghanistan in violent resistance against Soviet forces (Hegghammer, 2010). This also resulted in an influx of millions of Afghan refugees into the NMTDs, and the rest of Pakistan. Afghan fighters, along with volunteers of NMTDs and foreign support, forced the withdrawal of Soviet forces. However, this gave birth to Mujahideen and the ideology of *Jihad* for socially violent mobilization against foreign invaders. The Mujahideen commanders propagated religious fundamentalism and severely affected the culture and traditions of NMTDs. On the Pakistani side, it was predominantly the issue of foreign policy, and Pakistan's joining of hands with the USA on the global war on terror, which resulted in PSC in the region.

Until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the people of NMTDs lived the way they wanted. However, the joining of locals as Mujahideen to fight against Soviet forces resulted in the rise of Talibanization. The Taliban later took over from traditional *Malaks* and started administering the region along religious lines as per their understanding. However, the Pakistani authorities later resisted Talibanization and took control of the region with rehabilitation programs for the community. The US presence in Afghanistan is based on the existence of terrorism in the region. This

also helps TTP elements to strengthen their narrative of the war against invaders (the US in Afghanistan) and her allies supporting GWOT (Pakistan) (Ali Shinwari, personal communication, May 22, 2020).

On the other hand, India is exploiting the situation and supports militancy in NMTDs to settle the score with her rival Pakistan. At present, Pakistan is engaged on the western border with the US (based in Afghanistan) and on the eastern border with India. The USA is in a state of chaos in Afghanistan and cannot manage the conflict. The use of force (operations) and peace processes are going on side by side (Landay et al., 2020) Pakistan is blamed time and again for its (US and allied forces) failure in Afghanistan and is asked to 'do more' (Yousaf, 2010, pp. 1-2). Whereas Pakistan has already paid a heavy price on GWOT that has severely impacted the economy, damaged infrastructure, suffered losses of human lives, and psychological trauma to the society as a whole. The FDI fell to \$ 463 million during the first quarter as against \$1.116 billion during the same period in the previous year (a decline of 58.5 percent). The frequent incidents of terrorism have brought a bad name to Pakistan in the world and international markets. Terrorism has damaged the economy, polity, and society of Pakistan, on multiple levels (Ali, 2010). The political rebuttal is continuing between both the governments on the war on terror; however, Pakistan has been able to control its side to a large extent and is now in the process of consolidation and rehabilitation (Saeed, 2017). Whereas the USA has initiated peace dialogue with the Taliban, though it is yet to take its course towards sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, Indian consulates in Afghanistan are in rivalry with Pakistan, and Pakistani officials have stated openly Indian involvement in undermining Pakistan's security and stability⁴. DG ISPR has given official statements on Indian involvement in causing terrorism in Pakistan. He stated: "India has been busy in fomenting unrest through terrorism using Afghan soil (Global Village, 2018). There are rare cases of uncovering the participation of serving officers of intelligence agencies operating in other countries. Indian Naval serving Officer Commander Yadav was apprehended in Pakistan on conducting terrorist activities to destabilize Pakistan. His video confession stated that his activities have been anti-national or terrorist in nature that resulted in killing or maiming of a Pakistani citizen. Even the Prime Minister of India while his visit to Bangladesh in 2015 openly stated Indian active participation in 1971 causing separation of East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) from West Pakistan (Khetran, 2017, p. 112). Maleeha Lodhi, (the erstwhile permanent) representative to UN, submitted a dossier to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres containing shreds of evidence of Indian terrorism in Pakistan (Ibid, p. 115).

Foreign intervention by a superpower in the present era has received a blowback effect in terms of anti-Americanization, especially in conflict zone countries or underdeveloped regions. Before US attacks in Afghanistan in 2001, there was a rare incident of terrorism or militancy against state authorities, however, due to international anarchy; the US intervention in Afghanistan and Pakistan's support to the US in GWOT, the region was triggered with violence turning to PSC for almost last two decades.

⁴A viral video on social media shows Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval stating that the best way to tackle Pakistan is through terrorism.

Situating PSC and Conflict in NMTDs

While structural realism, capitalism and globalization, all have a role in contributing to militancy in NMTDs, there is a need to analyze factors, which specifically contribute to PSC. Edward Azar identifies communal content, human need, the role of state and governance, and international linkages, as contributors to PSC. He states that disarticulation between the state and society is the core problem initiating PSC (Azar, 1990). The term identifies the violent relations between the communal groups based on historical, ethnic, religious and cultural hatred as the basis of conflict generation, in attempts to the protection of rights based on groups' communal identity. Following the colonial pattern and governance based on the FCR, the community of the NMTDs remained largely isolated from the rest of the country even after the country's independence in 1947. This resulted in the development of stronger bonds between the local communities, and the strengthening of local culture to safeguard against the threat to the communities from outside powers. The decision to support the US in GWOT, and the stationing of Pakistan security forces in NMTDs were threatening to the community of the region. It encouraged them towards resistance and violent mobilization, hence resulting in PSC. Additionally, the area continued to rely on the *Jirga system* (local dispute settlement mechanism as per own traditions and culture) and remained deprived of social development in education, health and the economic domain. (Amin-u-Haq Qadri, personal communication, June 22, 2020). The cleavages between state and community caused the deprivation of human need and increased the gap in development between settled areas of KP and NMTDs. As per Azar, international linkages are one of the major contributing factors in PSC. International linkages involve the "political-economic relations of economic dependency within the international economic system and the network of political-military linkages constituting regional and global patterns of clientage and cross-border interest" (Azar, 1990). The US foothold in Afghanistan and movement of Pakistan security forces to NMTDs resulted in the expansion of militancy in the region. Though successful military operations and limited social development have mitigated the PSC, however, the decades' deprived region needs a massive rehabilitation program to fulfill basic needs at par with settled areas of the country.

Concluding Remarks

The theoretical construct of capitalism, globalization and structural realism have contributed to the conflict in NMTDs while internal dynamics such as the state's neglect of society resulted in PSC in the region. The US intervention in Afghanistan, and Pakistan's support to the US-led forces in Afghanistan, has severely affected peace in the NMTDs region. Capitalism has attracted beneficiaries of the conflict and generated a war economy through conflict in the NMTDs region. The intrastate conflict is protracted due to tools of globalization as it has attracted both foreign state authorities and militants alike to escalate the conflict (by using tools of globalization). The militants used information technology to spread terror and develop an anti-American narrative, in addition to operating from Afghanistan to target the NMTDs region. Capitalism, globalization and structural realism have therefore worked together to create and protract conflict. However, the effective role of state and governance can mitigate the effects of PSC. Therefore, the Government of Pakistan needs to pay special attention to education, health, economy, and justice to rehabilitate society on a fast track.

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