

# President Obama's Policy Options in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)



A REPORT BY

**Institute for Social Policy  
and Understanding**

**Hassan Abbas**

Fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU)  
Fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government

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# Introduction

There is an emerging consensus among foreign policy experts that the growing insurgency and militancy in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) poses the greatest security challenge not only to Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also to the United States. Some scholars even project that a major terrorist act with al-Qaeda footprints in the United States might result in an American strike and ground invasion of this area.<sup>1</sup> President Barack Obama has repeatedly talked about stepping up military action in Afghanistan as a panacea to the expanding crisis in that country and hinted as early as August 2007 that if elected, he would sanction direct military strikes in FATA if there were "actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets" and if Pakistan failed to act.<sup>2</sup> Situation has deteriorated in the region during the last year further complicating Obama's policy options for stabilizing South Asia.<sup>3</sup>

Turbulence and insurgency is not new to the Pak-Afghan tribal borderland. In the historical context, Afghanistan was a flashpoint of Anglo-Russian rivalry in the nineteenth century, and tribes living in the borderland played a crucial role in what is often termed the "great game." The Soviet-American confrontation in the last quarter of the twentieth century further re-energized the traditional warrior-like ethos of the area's tribes, as FATA became the base camp for religious warriors from around the world eager to confront the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Abundant financial resources and armaments were made available by the West (primarily the United States and the United Kingdom) as well as Saudi Arabia for the cause, and Pakistani intelligence services delivered the goods. The doctrine of jihad was conveniently reframed to inspire the fighters. Eventually, the Soviet Union could not bear the burden and had to retreat, leaving Afghanistan open to all local and regional contenders for power. Consequently, a brutal civil war erupted in 1989 and the western handlers of the war sneaked out without any notice. Pakistan and Iran tried to manage and manipulate the crisis through their favorites; however, this strategy backfired and the Taliban, posing as a stabilizing force, emerged on the scene in 1994. Pakistan quickly adopted them, and Saudi support came in handy. Until September 11, 2001, Taliban brutality and oppression reigned supreme in Afghanistan, and FATA served as the conduit for the Pakistani support. Tragically, none of the players that brought Afghanistan to this plight felt any guilt. Even if they did, they never expressed it.

The post-Taliban years (2002-08) witnessed FATA's re-emergence as a hub of militant activity. Surprisingly, Pakistan and the United States paid little attention to this area and its dynamics in 2002-03, due to their myopic belief in the illusion that the Taliban were gone with the wind. The international community promised the Afghans a new life, and for a while there was hope in the air. But under the radar screens, Arab and Central Asian warriors who had enjoyed Taliban hospitality in the 1990s quietly started shifting to FATA where they found equally welcoming new hosts. They knew each other well. In the eyes of Pakistan's military government at that time, the Taliban were not enemies. In fact, its friendly gestures toward the retreating Taliban were akin to an insurance policy, for Pakistan could very well require their services in the future. Given that the two countries share a 1,500-mile border in a largely unmarked mountainous terrain, Pakistan could neither regulate nor even monitor cross-border movement effectively.

Finally with American prodding, Pakistan moved its military units inside FATA – a first for Pakistan's army. The tribal leadership reacted ferociously, as such an action was deemed contrary to established norms. In 2003-04, the army offered some peace deals to the local tribes, especially in the two Waziristan agencies, to control the situation. Such efforts were to little avail, however, for this was around the time when the “nation-building project” in Afghanistan started showing signs of stress and the reverse flow of the Taliban and the likes started taking place more robustly – from FATA to the Pashtun-dominated south of Afghanistan. By then, Hamid Karzai was routinely dubbed as merely “the mayor of Kabul” who needed foreign guards to provide his personal security. The limited mandate of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was partially responsible for this state of affairs. There were other factors as well, as according to Mark L. Schneider's (senior vice president, International Crisis Group) April 2008 testimony before the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia:

*The current state of affairs was not inevitable. It resulted from policy choices early on in the international community; light military and political footprints with the co-opting of local and all too frequently corrupt militia leaders rather than international boots on the ground.<sup>4</sup>*

The situation on the Pakistani side was also deteriorating: FATA and some parts of the adjacent North West Frontier Province (NWFP) were gradually slipping out of its control to such an extent that in recent weeks, militants routinely hit NATO supply lines and storage depots in Peshawar, the capital of NWFP, thus forcing the United States and NATO to consider other more expensive logistic routes. On average in 2008, Pakistan experienced one suicide attack every five days: 66 attacks in all, which killed around 965 persons (651 civilians, 159 security forces personnel, and 155 policemen).<sup>5</sup> The numbers are much higher if all types of terrorist attacks



are counted. For instance, in the NWFP alone, the 475 terrorist attacks carried out in 2008 killed around 575 people.<sup>6</sup> Although militant groups based in other parts of the country (mostly Punjab province) were also involved in some of these attacks, FATA provided the major bulk. Analyzing the 2007 database of 26 cases of suicide attacks in Pakistan (out of a total of 61) where Special Investigative Unit of Pakistan's FIA recovered crucial evidence, they concluded: "More than eighty percent of suicide bombers belong to Mehsud tribe (residing in South and North Waziristan) and were aged 15 to 20."<sup>7</sup>

Many suicide bombers who struck inside Afghanistan also traveled there from the NWFP and FATA.<sup>8</sup> Presently, Pakistan's security forces are battling various brands of Taliban in different parts of FATA as well as the NWFP in an expanding insurgency environment. Despite the success of the nationalist and anti-Taliban Awami National Party's (ANP) electoral success in the NWFP's February 2008 elections, the overall situation remains dire.

This report focuses on what all of this means for Pakistan and the United States and how these trends can be reversed. The above historical background was deemed necessary to set the stage for this, as a selective reading of history all too often distorts facts and limits policymakers' vision. A basic assessment of the ground realities in FATA is presented and followed with an appraisal of the Bush administration's policies and an effort to decipher the Obama administration's thinking on the subject. Based on these evaluations, recommendations are made for both the Obama administration and the present government of Pakistan.

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## Basic Ground Realities

### *Who Controls FATA?*

The seven tribal agencies of FATA (Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, Mohmand, Bajaur, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan), which cover some 27,500 square kilometers (10,510 square miles) and is home to around 4 million Pashtuns, has historically been – and remains – a semi-autonomous region, despite the presence of Pakistani security forces.<sup>9</sup> Even at the best of times, Pakistan's sovereignty there was limited. In relation to socio-political issues, the traditional institution of *jirga* (assembly of tribal elders) used to define the laws, regulations, and policies. But now, this power has largely shifted into the hands of a younger generation of religious zealots: the neo-Taliban, represented by an umbrella organization *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) and other smaller groups operating exclusively in different agencies.<sup>10</sup> Political agents representing the federal government in each agency and who dispense “stipends” to local leaders (*maliks*) have lost

control in most agencies, and their writ is very limited. Many of those who were elected in February 2008 to represent FATA in Pakistan's National Assembly do not dare go to their hometowns in daylight. The people of FATA pay no taxes (or electricity bills), and Pakistani courts have no jurisdiction over them. A British Raj-era oppressive administrative system, the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), is the still law of the land. Lastly the Pashtuns, still view the Durand Line that has divided their tribes between Pakistan and



Afghanistan since 1893, with great contempt and resentment.

The rise of the TTP and similar groups in FATA and the NWFP has cut into the support base of mainstream religious parties, especially the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI) and the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl* group (JUI-F). While both groups share some common political agendas as regards the Sharia and the West, they are pursuing different goals: the TTP and the TNSM want to enforce their views at all costs, whereas the JI and the JUI-F participate in electoral politics. In the prevailing scenario, however, the younger generation of religiously oriented people is finding militant groups more attractive.<sup>11</sup>

### ***The Pakistan Army's Operations in the Area***

Pakistan's army units, which moved into FATA in 2003 for the first time in country's history, initially opted to engage different tribes through "peace deals." But these fizzled, out one after the other. In the process, militants beheaded around 300 *maliks* on the pretext that they were collaborating with the Pakistani army and intelligence services. This is simply unprecedented, as *maliks* traditionally enjoyed respect across tribal divides. This happened primarily because FATA's inhabitants now see the Pakistani army as an alien force.<sup>12</sup> The Frontier Corps (FC), which is largely made up of soldiers belonging to the area's various Pashtun tribes, also failed to deliver due to its inadequate resources, poor training, ancient equipment, and, most importantly, low morale. Moreover, the army and the FC are not trained for counterinsurgency operations, which limit their capacity to deliver. The crisis has been compounded by *fatwas* (religious edicts) issued by many extremist religious figures declaring that army soldiers killed in encounters with tribal militias are not *shaheeds* (martyrs). Currently, the army is engaged in tough battles in the Bajaur and Khyber agencies; the results so far have been mixed. In addition, high civilian casualties have damaged its image in the eyes of FATA's inhabitants.

### ***Militancy Expands from FATA to the NWFP***

The growing militancy in FATA started impacting the adjacent NWFP (also predominantly Pashtun) from 2005-06 onward. The sheer incompetence of the Pakistani government under President Pervez Musharraf led to its failure to recognize this emerging threat. And so Pakistan started losing its writ in parts of the NWFP in 2007, especially in the Swat, Khyber, Hangu and Kohat districts. Taliban-like groups emerged with striking regularity to bomb girls' schools, kidnap people for ransom, destroy video and music shops, threaten artists, ban the shaving of beards, force a strict imposition of the *burqa* (head-to-toe veil) for women, and attack NGOs, especially those employing women and foreigners.<sup>13</sup> In the Kurram agency, the Shia community has been specifically targeted, and many militants belonging to anti-Shia outfits from Punjab have shifted to FATA in recent years. In this mayhem, many criminals and drug smugglers made fortunes due to poor law enforcement.

In the latest Taliban attacks, the homes and families of leading members of the ruling Awami National Party (ANP) in the NWFP are being targeted to discourage them from taking strong policy decisions against militants. In Swat, the *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi* (TNSM – Movement for the Enforcement of Sharia Law) reins supreme. TNSM leader

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Maulana Fazlullah issues draconian directives to all and sundry through his FM radio broadcasts on an almost daily basis – and this remains ongoing even in the early days of 2009, despite a major military operation in the area.<sup>14</sup> Its threats to Swat policemen to give up their jobs if they want safety are so effective that some cops have taken out advertisements in local newspapers announcing their resignation. In addition, the Taliban have publicly announced the imposition of their distorted version of Sharia law in the Hangu district (NWFP) and the neighboring Orakzai agency (FATA) in the first week of 2009.<sup>15</sup> The crux of the matter is that the militants' influence is no longer confined to FATA and, given the ethnic and linguistic bonds between FATA and the NWFP, it is no longer feasible to think only in terms of tackling FATA. Any solution has to be proportionally broader in its impact.

### *How Pakistan Views the Problem*

The important Pakistani players see the FATA crisis through many different lenses. For the new democratic government, the answer is cooperating with President Karzai and taking strong action against the militants, coupled with development projects for FATA. The problem, however, is that due to the long period of military rule, any transition to democracy is both slow as well as tricky. In other words, the civilian administration has

a complicated relationship with the army at the moment. The powerful military establishment believes that India has expanded its influence in Afghanistan's corridors of power and is involved in fueling militancy inside Baluchistan as well as FATA.<sup>16</sup> In addition, many hawkish public opinion makers routinely argue that what is happening in FATA is, in fact, a conspiracy to encircle and weaken Pakistan with the ultimate target of denuclearizing it.<sup>17</sup> The army leadership has no sympathy for the militants, who have routinely targeted and killed army officers and soldiers in recent years, and their major operations in the Bajaur and Swat areas clearly show that. Still, in South as well as North Waziristan, the two hubs of terrorist activity in FATA, no significant military action is underway, as some "peace deals" are intact.<sup>18</sup> For the American and NATO forces in Afghanistan, on the other hand, these two agencies are a major headache due to presence of many foreign militants as well as Afghan Taliban. Evidently, Pakistan lacks a coherent counter-terrorism policy and this is eating into its vitals.

This complex situation is further exacerbated by the Mumbai attacks in November 2008, especially in terms of rising India-Pakistan tensions. In response, Pakistan has reportedly moved some of its military units from FATA to its eastern border with India. To the great surprise of many, some Taliban and militant fighters soon declared that in case of a war with India, they will join hands with the army to defend the country. In response, unnamed Pakistani officials called TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud and TNSM leader Fazlullah "patriotic Pakistanis" in front of the Pakistani media.<sup>19</sup> It is simply mind boggling.

Overall, due to the above-mentioned contradictions, there is a lack of consensus among ordinary Pakistanis on how the government should deal with FATA. According to a 2008 FATA residents' survey conducted by Center for Research and Security Studies, a credible Islamabad based think tank, roughly 90% are opposed to the Taliban's worldview and activities, 20% acknowledge that foreign militants are present in the area,

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and 75% are against the army's presence in FATA.<sup>20</sup>

## American Policy during the Bush Years (2001-08)

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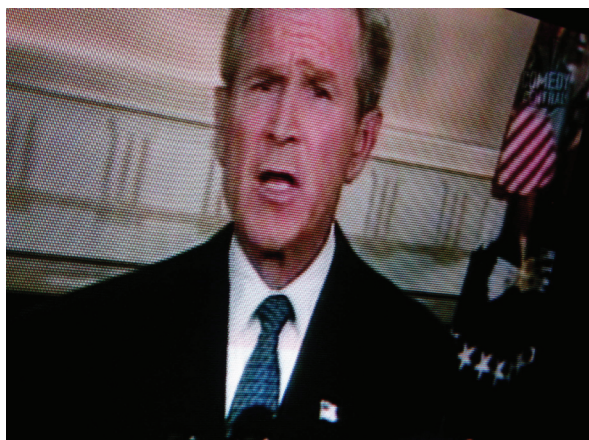
Pakistan moved its military into FATA in 2003, after the Bush administration pushed it in this direction despite differences between the American Defense and State Departments on the subject. This was an important move from the American perspective, as many militants from the South Waziristan agency were found to be involved in attacking American forces inside Afghanistan and then retreating into FATA, where American forces were not authorized to follow them.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, as Arab fighters and Taliban leaders were pouring into FATA, President Musharraf convinced American policymakers that he was completely against al-Qaeda operators; however, he gave no such commitment about the Afghan Taliban. Many people speculated that whenever the United States applied pressure, Musharraf would order limited attacks on militant hideouts in FATA to buy more time. Apparently, the Bush administration was either unaware of this trend or was too busy planning the invasion of Iraq to focus on this region. Things started changing in early 2004, when two assassination attempts on Musharraf were found to have been planned in South Waziristan.

All along, the United States trusted and supported Musharraf to the hilt, especially after Pakistan's FC started a major operation in South Waziristan in March 2004. The operation was a massive failure, as the militants were well prepared. When army units were finally called in to teach the militants a lesson, many civilians were killed in the ensuing operations and around 50,000 residents fled to adjoining agencies. This outcome created a general disenchantment that provoked a strong reaction and opened up the floodgates of potential recruits for the militants. The Bush administration interpreted this as a sign of Musharraf's commitment, not knowing that the sheer incompetence, poor intelligence, and ill-preparedness of Pakistan's security forces was at play instead. It took the Bush administration a few more years to realize that something was rotten. The military-to-military relationship continued to grow, however, and a major portion of American aid was diverted toward fulfilling the military's requirements, thereby leaving very little for badly needed development projects. Intelligence sharing between the two countries also led to attacks in FATA by American drones (unmanned surveillance planes with missile capability), which were, at times, officially owned by Pakistan. At other times, Pakistan looked the other way. The results were mixed, as very few important al-Qaeda or Taliban elements were eliminated through such strikes; collateral damage was high, however, and anti-American feelings in Pakistan grew.

Pro-democracy and civil society elements in Pakistan kept on wailing that the military could neither run the country efficiently nor tackle the rising militancy effectively; such complaints, however, fell on deaf ears. Attacks by American-made drones in FATA increased in 2007-08, especially after Musharraf fell in August 2008. Failing to see any significant result, the United States attempted a ground operation in September 2008 and its drones hit a target in the NWFP in November 2008. These actions elicited a strong reaction

from the Pakistani army leadership; the reaction of Pakistan's political leadership, however, was somewhat muted. A predominant majority of politicians and people seriously object to such attacks, which they consider humiliating violations of their sovereignty. In response, the Americans argue that Pakistan can claim sovereignty over a territory only if they have effective control over it – a questionable view in light of the norms of international law. According to a Gallup poll, 45 percent of Pakistanis think that the American presence in Afghanistan poses a threat to Pakistan.<sup>22</sup>

To be fair, the Bush administration's compulsions and genuine limitations also deserve mention. The American-led military campaign in Afghanistan depends for around 80 percent of its cargo and 40 percent of its fuel requirements on transit shipments through Pakistani territory.<sup>23</sup> Second, many seasoned American



experts aligned with the Bush administration are convinced that the Pakistan army is the only organized, resourceful, and disciplined force that can defeat the terrorists located inside Pakistan. The warming of relations between the Pentagon and the Pakistan Army's General Headquarters (GHQ) can be understood in this light. Engaging moderate elements among the Taliban in Afghanistan is apparently another evolving American initiative that will require support from Pakistan's military and intelligence services. American military commanders' frustration with the performance of the NATO allies, whose troops make up more than half of the total foreign forces in Afghanistan, also remained a constant distraction.

However, there were some constructive developments. For instance, in March 2008 a joint American-Afghanistan-Pakistan military intelligence center tasked with limiting cross-border militant movement and coordinating information among each country's officials became functional along the Afghan-Pakistan border.<sup>24</sup> Five more such centers, three in Afghanistan and two in Pakistan (at a cost of \$ 3 million each), are expected to start functioning soon. Why it took seven long years for such collaborative efforts to begin is an important question here.

In the final estimate, as far as the Bush administration's performance in Afghanistan is concerned, Professor Andrew Bacevitch's provocative analysis is instructive: "Apart from enabling Afghanistan to reclaim its status as the world's number one producer of opium, U.S. efforts to pacify that nation and nudge it toward modernity have produced little."<sup>25</sup>

## Early Policy Indicators from President Obama

President Obama's initial campaign statements about Pakistan created a stir there, especially when he said that he would sanction the unilateral targeting of terrorists in Pakistan. Later, he clarified this by saying: "What I've said is that if we had actionable intelligence against high-value al-Qaida targets, and the Pakistani government was unwilling to go after those targets, that we should."<sup>26</sup> On a separate occasion, Obama also maintained that he would make hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid to Pakistan conditional



on Pakistan making substantial progress in closing down training camps, evicting foreign fighters, and preventing the Taliban from using its territory as a staging area for attacks on Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup> This caused Juan Cole to observe that in case of Pakistan, Obama “is simply dictating policy in a somewhat bellicose fashion, and ignoring the wishes of those moderate parties whose election he lauded last February.”<sup>28</sup>

However, a deeper look at Obama’s declarations on Pakistan-related issues shows that he values a regional approach to tackling extremism and militancy in South Asia and his understanding of the crisis is sophisticated and far richer than that of Bush administration.<sup>29</sup> For instance, in June 2007, he wrote in one of his early policy papers: “I will encourage dialogue between Pakistan and India to work toward resolving their dispute over Kashmir.”<sup>30</sup> In a *Time* magazine interview in November 2008, he argued that Pakistan would not fully commit to fighting the insurgency it shares with Afghanistan until it sheds its historic insecurities toward India and that resolving the Kashmir conflict will be among the “critical tasks for the next administration.”<sup>31</sup>

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Ahmed Rashid and Barnett Rubin, two leading experts on the region, also favored a regional approach in terms of addressing rivalries and insecurities in their joint piece in *Foreign Affairs* recently. The need for designating a special American envoy for this purpose was emphasized in the media as well as in American policymaking circles and consequently Richard Holbrook, a seasoned diplomat known for his effective mediator skills has been appointed by the Obama administration as US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although prospects of pursuing a regional policy became more complicated after the Mumbai attacks, Obama in a very recent statement again reiterated that he would “make a series of not just military but also diplomatic moves that fully enlist Pakistan as an ally in that region, that lessen tensions between India and Pakistan, and then get everybody focused on rooting out militancy...”<sup>32</sup> It seems that the emergence of a needed “soft power” strategy is in the making. General David Petraeus tends to agree with Obama’s more regional approach to Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> In a USIP event in January 2009, Petraeus even hinted that even Iran could join the regional effort for the purpose.<sup>34</sup>

## Ten Steps that Pakistan Should Take

1. FATA should be fully incorporated into Pakistan by scrapping the FCR (as already promised by the new government), thereby extending the Pakistan Political Parties Act (allowing all political parties to function there), and either make it a part of the NWFP or declare it to be separate province, as an equal federating unit.<sup>35</sup> This would make its people stakeholders in the future of Pakistan as a state.
2. A reconciliation commission should be established to ease the tense relations between the security forces and FATA’s residents, thousands of whom have been killed in military operations. The internally displaced should be helped to settle back into their hometowns and those responsible for human rights abuses should be prosecuted.

3. FATA's seven agencies, as demarcated by the British Raj, should be abolished, as these are named after certain major tribes; many smaller tribes resent this. The area should be divided into smaller districts named after the tribes that reside there, which could potentially enfranchise more groups and improve the administrative structure.

4. Involve FATA's inhabitants in the decision-making processes. An extra effort should be made to convince them that their opinions matter and that reforms are not being introduced at the behest of any foreign power.

5. Convert the paramilitary FC into a well-equipped and well-trained law enforcement/police force in which senior command positions are not be doled out to the military. These positions should initially go to Pashtun police officers (from the NWFP).

6. Close down the extremist *madrassas* operating in FATA, which provide recruits to militant groups. For the rest of the *madrassas*, establish a separate board that involves the NWFP's leading religious authorities to monitor the curriculum and other activities. A major effort is required to ban various extremist publications and confiscate propaganda CDs distributed by the Taliban in the area.

7. The Durand Line should be converted into a well-demarcated border manned by Pakistani army units until a proper border force can be established. Travel between Pakistan and Afghanistan should be properly regulated through several formal checkpoints.

8. The state should adopt a special focus on FATA's youths as one of its top priorities in order to delink them from the violent circumstances to which they are accustomed. This could be done by making major investments in schools, vocational training, and incentives for starting small businesses. These youths grew up listening to the legendary tales of the Afghan jihad against the Soviets and, in that light, many of them saw the Arab and Central Asian fighters as gallant warriors and heroes. Traditional norms of hospitality (according to Pashtunwali code) further encouraged them to continue to look after and even defend these foreigners when Pakistan's security forces began searching for them.

9. In the case of the NWFP, undertaking a major reform of the police service should be a top priority. This requires major financial support. The counter-terrorism funds that Pakistan's army receives from international donors (especially from the United States and the United Kingdom) should be shared with the province's civilian law enforcement agencies.

10. Pakistan's political leadership must concentrate on bringing all of the major political forces on board to develop and implement the above-mentioned steps so it can build a national consensus on the subject as

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well as provide moral support to the military for effective counter-insurgency operations when and where needed. The state's political legitimacy has to improve if such a policy is to be implemented effectively.

## Ten Steps that the American Government Should Take

1. The United States must think about repairing its image and standing. At present, the Pakistanis' perception of it affect the quality of the cooperation offered. For instance, there is evidence that the United States' effective and swift humanitarian assistance after the 2005 earthquake helped improve the Pakistani

public's view of it.<sup>36</sup> Given apprehensions among many Pakistanis (especially in the military and intelligence circles) about American interests in the region, improving the level of trust between the two countries is crucial. In this context, the United States should broaden its relationship with democratic forces in Pakistan and avoid overemphasizing the Pentagon-GHQ relationship. Moreover, the sacrifices rendered by Pakistan's armed forces in various campaigns against militants (especially in Swat and Bajaur) should be recognized.

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2. The United States should help India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan reconcile their differences in lieu of the emerging threats in the region. A good beginning would be to help Pakistan and Afghanistan settle the Durand Line issue so that border controls could improve and cross-border movement could be regulated. In the second stage, the United States

could convince Pakistan to do all in its power to dismantle the militant groups operating in the country under various names and convince India to soften its traditional stance and enter into meaningful dialogue process with Pakistan about resolving the Kashmir conflict – the “grand bargain” idea.

3. The American drone attacks policy needs a serious re-evaluation as, in the words of Juan Cole, it has fueled, rather than quenched, the insurgency. A commission of experts for evaluating past American policy in FATA and its effectiveness should probe this issue in depth.

4. At least 50 percent of American counter-terrorism funds must be redirected toward the capacity building of Pakistan's law enforcement (police) and civilian investigative agencies, such as the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). On the other hand, military aid should be invested in improving the Pakistan army's counter-insurgency capabilities.

5. In the process of devising a new and comprehensive FATA strategy, the United States should engage with the approximately 100,000 Pashtun-Americans, both for their ideas as well as for bridge building. Rather

than looking at them as potential “informants,” American agencies should consider benefiting from their analyses and insights.

**6.** Pakistan’s traditional friends (e.g., China, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia) should be involved in developing a cohesive development policy for FATA and the adjoining NWFP. These countries should also be represented in a monitoring mechanism established to ensure that all funds marked for development projects are properly utilized.

**7.** Initially, the focus should be on those projects that build the state’s legitimacy and create a demonstration effect throughout the tribal belt – for instance, rebuilding schools and roads, creating small health units and infrastructure improvements.

**8.** FATA residents should be involved in identifying quickly implementable small development projects to create a feeling of ownership. Educated and professional Pashtuns from the NWFP, Karachi, and even from the Pashtun Diaspora in the West could be asked not only to participate in the process of streamlining a development agenda for FATA, but also to run some projects. American aid for de-radicalization programs for jailed Pakistani militants, similar to the programs in Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Yemen, can pay dividends.<sup>37</sup>

**9.** Increased interaction between Pakistani and American academic institutions, as well as more scholarships for Pakistani scholars, would provide more space to secular and progressive elements in Pakistan who, in turn, are the best placed to challenge dogmatic tendencies in Pakistan in general and FATA/NWFP areas in particular.

**10.** American investment in Pakistan’s publishing industry would also serve the cause of education by countering the sophisticated propaganda war of religious militants. As things stand today, very few avenues exist for progressive Pakistani writers to get their works published, whereas many publishers continue to thrive by printing conservative and extremist religious discourses.

## Concluding Thoughts

The prevailing democratic transition in Pakistan, despite its limitations, provides the best opportunity for it, as well as for India and Afghanistan, to halt the region’s extremist trends through joint cooperation and trust building. Creative American policies can play a significant role in this context. If this window of opportunity proves to be short-lived, given the entrenched tensions between Pakistan’s civil and military institutions, then it would destabilize the whole region even further. Any rise in Indo-Pakistani tensions only benefits the forces of darkness in South Asia. On the

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positive side, most Pashtuns increasingly realize that Talibanization has tarnished their image and yearn to recapture their lost identity. The appetite of FATA's residents for self-governance outside the old tribal arrangements, as well as their desire to break the shackles imposed by the militants, deserve recognition as well as international support. An Iraq-style "surge" in Afghanistan and unilateral incursions in FATA are unlikely to be seen as reflecting any change. The Obama administration has the credentials to challenge the status quo and take difficult decisions for the cause of peace and justice in South Asia.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This assessment was made by Prof. Anatol Leiven. See, "Obama govt may extend war to FATA: UK expert," *The News*, Lahore, January 2, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Holland, "Tough Talk on Pakistan from Obama," *Reuters*, August 1, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, see, "U.S. Toll in Afghanistan at record high in 2008," *Reuters*, January 1, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> For complete text, see <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/Sch04022008.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Amir Mir, "Pakistan: Human bombs killed 80 people a month in 2008," *Middle East Transparent*, January 1, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Javed Aziz Khan, "2008 – A Year of Suicide Attacks," *The News*, January 2, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Telephone interview with a senior official of FIA, December 2008.

<sup>8</sup> See "Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan (2001-2007)," *United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan*, September 1, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Official statistics mention a figure of 3.5 million people, but independent sources in the NWFP and FATA believe the figure to be closer to 7 million; Interview with a former senior Pakistani diplomat who hails from FATA, in Ottawa, September 2008.

<sup>10</sup> For details about the genesis of TTP, see Hassan Abbas, "A Profile of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan," *CTC Sentinel*, volume 1, issue 2, pages 1-4, January 2008.

<sup>11</sup> See Joshua T. White, *Pakistan's Islamist Frontier: Islamic Politics and U.S. Policy in Pakistan's North-West*, Religion and Security Monograph Series, no. 1 (Arlington, VA: Center on Faith & International Affairs, 2008).

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## About the Author



### Hassan Abbas, ISPU Fellow

Hassan Abbas, a fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) and a fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, is the author of *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror* (M E Sharpe: 2005).

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**Institute for Social Policy  
and Understanding**

Institute for Social Policy and Understanding  
43151 Dalcoma, Suite 6  
Clinton Township, Michigan 48038  
Tel: 586.416.1150  
Fax: 586.415.2028  
E-mail: [info@ispu.org](mailto:info@ispu.org)  
[www.ispu.org](http://www.ispu.org)

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