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The Impacts of Militancy and Counterterrorism on Social Structures in Merged Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Study from 2001 to 2025

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ABSTRACT

Based on the most compelling available research, this study investigate the implications of militancy and counter terrorism measures in work at Pakistan's merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) former FATA from 2001 to 2025. It also examines how long-term conflicts has transformed traditional tribal forms of governance, undermined social ties and inflicted severe psychological scars- especially on the youth. Military operations although played an important role in the peace making however, often results in population displacement, undermined traditional cultural values and caused destructions of public facilities including educational, health and infrastructure services. Current study is an attempt to highlight that how traditional governance mechanisms such as the authority of Maliks (tribal chiefs), the operation of jirgas and hujras (socially designated spaces) that once underpinned stability were facing erosion. Narratives of violent, hateful extremism have further damaged cultural identity across defined boundaries and have the knock-on socio-political effects of militarization and sudden imposition by command of centralized governance. For instance, the region is mired in protracted instability and suffers from high rates of unemployment, widespread informal economic activities and a loss of traditional sources of livelihoods. This study also highlights the importance of embracing inclusive, contextually-specific, and community-centric development practices. It calls for all-encompassing rehabilitation programmes, youth engagement and tribal-sensitive policies



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to employment. The study is conducted through an interdisciplinary lens and contributes to the discourse on post-conflict reconstruction, the socio-political aftermath of counterinsurgency, and pathways to regional peace building. In the end, it reinforces that a lasting peace in the tribal belt of Pakistan, like any other region of the world, can only be achieved with consistency of governing bodies and the adoption of incentivize social solidarity with the community.

Keywords: Militancy, Counterterrorism, Merged Districts, FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governance

Introduction

The mountain belt turned out to be a crucible of conflict, militancy and counter terrorism ops in the years since 2001. The seven districts that ring the remote and virtually unsecurable Afghanistan border have long been a geopolitical boundary marinated by foreign jihadists that were involved in blasting of 9/11. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan and others came into these areas with a shared blood lust of killing, ERAs of pain, slowly tearing apart the very fabric that made this region unique tribal kinship breaking it down through an iron fisted grip killing all those who dared to be educated. On the other hand, several of the most radical factions disintegrated, their own ranks divided among more splinter sub-sects than in history. For women, the breakdown of social order degraded into patriarchal clan warfare with little quarter for even their most fundamental human rights. Ultimately, leaving a power vacuum that nurtured radicalization & societal decadence. There were no more territories to gain, these would be a series of terrible and very costly human losses achieved by the government over years through massive military operations commenced from late 2002 in areas under control or influence of insurgents. Hundreds of thousands of hapless people are forced to stay in a state of displacement and trauma for quite a long duration or thought ever spared on rehabilitation package.

The 2018 constitutional amendment made to merge the FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been a step in that direction. Consequently, successful integration, which includes (but is not limited to) securing law and order but also facilitating more regular inclusion in governance, preserving cultural heritage and providing access to education, health care and economic livelihoods has to be part of a fully-fledged short medium long term strategy. Unfortunately, without a holistic program of physical and social reconstruction in Pakistan, then much of this region was slide back into neglect and conflict, with obvious implications for the even more fragile peace building across the KPK.

The tribal borderlands of Pakistan, particularly along the Afghan frontier, became a center of militancy and counter-terrorism after 2001. The region's porous geography and weak governance allowed foreign jihadists and groups like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to exploit its terrain. Traditional tribal structures were dismantled as militants imposed coercion, silenced education, and fractured the social fabric through violence and fear.

The consequences were devastating: women lost access to basic rights, schools and health facilities were destroyed, and entire communities faced large-scale displacement during military operations. Though these operations dismantled militant strongholds, inadequate rehabilitation policies left many families in prolonged trauma and poverty.

Review of Literature

In Pakistan on the Brink, Ahmed Rashid forcefully condemned overreliance on military forces and under-deployment of social, economic solutions in countering terrorism. While



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this allowed for tactical wins, failures to address the deep ideological, financial and political roots of extremism meant that the conditions that had driven radicalization in disconnected youth persisted. Uncontrolled infusion of foreign funding into radical madrassas only aided the propagation of extremist discourse.

As Akbar S. Ahmed examined in his book *The Thistle and the Drone*, a combination of centuries-old marginalization, fragile governance and post-9/11 geopolitical dynamics coalesced to produce militant madness in distant lands like FATA. The localities of the Pashtunwali residing areas got undressed from traditional authority and shaken by fear, violence approached to its climax and society's ties destructed, as militant doctrines had simply kicked off with an assumption to rebel against previous increasing disputes. However, instead of winning hearts and minds, drone strikes and countering-terror military operations left a trail of civilian death and displacement that kept social trauma going.

Hence the importance of Farhat Taj's 2011 fieldwork on Talibanisation in FATA she discovered that outfits such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Islam and foreign jihadists were disrupting well-established systems by running kangaroo courts, abolishing traditional jirgas and reshuffling gender roles in the region; even schools were no longer deemed safe. Similarly, in the 2020 review Hassan Abbas also acknowledges that operations such as Rah-e-Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad have neutralized terrorist networks but regrets their limited efforts to enforce durable governance or rehabilitation, thereby leaving communities vulnerable to relapse into instability. These calls for comprehensive development and integration plans resonate with Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies reports in 2022 highlighting the need of restored trust and cohesion across the merged districts.

In his *Lone Wolf*, Imtiaz Gul in-depth history *The Most Dangerous Place* (2010), Al-Qaeda, the Haqqani Network and TTP infiltrated into the tribal belt via the porous Durand Line soaks up with outsiders' post 9/11, showing governance void fitting radicalisation. The result was to exacerbate already existing sectarian tensions, uproot populations and disintegrate what had been relatively stabilised tribal structures in North and South Waziristan.

A more pertinent analysis men while is from Khadim Hussain in 2015 focusing on how sustained military operations have lead to devastation of education and health across the region. His study shows how the cardinal strategies like Rah-e-Haq, Rah-e-Nijat and Zarb-e-Azb transformed schools into rubble-bed-clinics, markets razed to ground & housing structure crushed under military boots. A claim which is supported by the fact that between 2007 and 2017 more than 800 learning institutions were either destroyed or become deteriorated according to Pakistan Education Statistics. Long-term disruption of education deepens disparities in literacy and creates generational gaps in engagement with scholarship, as well as trust in civil authority.

Even after militants have fled, and areas freshly consolidated following a new round of redistricting, the 2022 report by the UNDP underscored that districts still struggle with psychic wounds and fragmented communities. Joblessness scar era high amongst youth, with cultural dislocation worsened by mental illness some slowness of recovery and little critical mass input from locals. Displaced families too often return to find themselves enmeshed in land conflicts, cut off from their means of productions and without traditional protection structures, while state authorities move slowly to step into the vacuum of governance.

Historical Background

The (now) erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA – before they were



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merged into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018) comprised of seven tribal agencies and six Frontier Regions, with an estimated population of around five million people as per the 2017 census. The region can be roughly divided into three ethnic groups, though they still remain predominantly tribal in many areas and other regions where there is little social distinction between the tribes such as parts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa which only have Pashtun tribes. Militarily, the scene shifted when Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan in late 1979, opening the floodgates for fresh currents of Afghan refugees along with madrassas through which heavily armed mujahideens fought their way. The War on Terror then under military rule it became a key ally in the US-led coalition undermining Al-Qaeda and Taliban, who had predicated there prior to the 9/11 attacks; early operations by Pakistan during its occupation all radical groups: Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Islam, Haqqani network were designated foreign terrorist like tabdeeli (change).

Militant infrastructure was disrupted no doubt, but not without immense displacement and property destruction, simultaneously weakening tribal elders and jirgas as an institution, while disrupting any educational or healthcare activity. The 2018 constitutional merger was intended to mainstream the districts within nationhood; however, 15 years of militancy and the ensuing counterterrorism campaign has left deep social, cultural and economic footprints that now shape much of what we refer to as post-merger challenges.

Merged Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: The Metamorphosis from FATA

In 2018, more than a century of rule by the brutal Frontier Crimes Regulation was finally brought to an unforgettable close when the 25th constitutional amendment formalized the integration of FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Which had been the way that FATA lived since its birth more than a century ago a liminal territory between but apart from Pakistan, governed by tribal maliks and jirgas subject to some degree of federal oversight by political agents. Flawed as it was, this semi-democratic system managed to keep Iraq stable if artificial. The post 9/11 world meant a change like the FATA that provided shelter to militant groups e.g Al-Qaeda, TTP and other transnational militants which in return required wide military operation to wipe out their safe havens thereby destroying the governance apparatus along with them. The security exigencies in FATA resulted in mass migration and human suffering, drawing attention to the fact that annexing territory, at arms-length from federal governance arrangements, was not viable in practice for the longer-term. I think this explains why the public narratives by civil society, youth and policy circles had to become strident so that when the 2014 National Action Plan told us what we have been saying for decades at least twice in our living history we could say it with chutzpa (they also abolished FCR; main stream FATA politically to legal and administrative mainstreaming with KP for rule of law & development just).

Where on the one hand integration has included FATA people to vote in provincial assembly & part and parcel of local bodies, however the dissonance between state functions and customary norms are trouble. However, the place still has its age-old land disputes and there are tribal institutions that remain weak; then there's the vast gap between FATA and the rest of KP in economic terms and more structural work to be done as a guarantee ensures it keeps on track to success. Addressing these growing pain will require a sustained commitment to closing disparities through universal access to good schools, healthcare and jobs in EVERY corner of our city growth in Crown Hill means little if it doesn't extend all the way down across Rainier Ave as we grow from 10K to the new norm (istol) another 15 and an insistent with governance for whole-district investment. Famed as well the federation of Fata with KP isn't even a new chapter but more like an introduction to what clearly should have never been anything apart to begin with save for



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addressing core distortions that remain fixed in place during over 100 years. The rest, well that remains to be seen; those merger promises will only actually come true for the residents of erstwhile existing districts once we have managed a bit more patience and enough on-going devolution

The Seven Districts (Geographical Location and Demographic Profile)

Pakistan's north western frontier regions – the merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, previously known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are geostrategically important areas in Pakistan. Covering some 27,220 square kilometres (10,500 square miles), these districts security is mainly on the border with Afghanistan separated from it only by the porous 2,640-kilometre-long Durand Line. The rugged landscape comprised of the formidable peaks and rippling troughs divided by slim, precarious corridors traditionally functioned as channels for cross-border commerce, human activity and conquest. Throughout the centuries humans, and armies dared to cross these formidable mountain ranges traversing through the Khyber and Ghulam Khan routes. It was these sorts of topological impediments that presented problems for state control but perversely, in an age where ever-sufficing transnationalisms were on the rise enabled the seepage and militant encampment cross-border after 2001. According to the 2017 census, these districts collectively govern over a population of around five million people. North Waziristan and Khyber can have the largest countries and Orakzai may be the tiniest. Both Bajaur and Mohmand also lie on the border with Afghanistan, specifically Kunar and Nangarhar provinces, yet more geopolitical dynamite is to be found as Kurram further south borders Paktia and Khost; hence further internationalisation. Its inhabitants follow a way of life called Pashtunwali, which involves ultra-conservative social and religious rituals.

Pre-2001 Socio-Political Structure

Before 2001, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas operated an internally-regulated set of legal systems founded in a pre-colonial, central authority. The area was directly under one-man control, the potent Political Agent exercising combined executive, judicial and financial powers. Notably, the draconian Frontier Crimes Regulation which authorized collective responsibility in punishing entire tribes for actions of a few subordinated civil liberties to tribal cohesion. Power was local etched in tradition-bound institutions where Maliks wielded clout and Jirgas made decisions, disciplining the populace along lines of practice, which kept women out of daily life and marginalized groups separate from general population. Law enforcement was minimal and localised; the Khasadars and Levies were controlled by the Political Agent. With no modern police, courts and administration, little government presence in the area meant residents had become isolated from mainstream political processes, legal standards and development. This allowed some level of self-rule, and maintained culture, but only stagnation followed through them as well as lack of basic rights. This remoteness and lack of government control allowed for radical ideas to grow and to foster smuggling, piracy, etc. Those colossal changes precipitated from 2001 onwards thanks to the global war on terror, large-scale military operations and eventual constitutional reforms tore much of the above system apart. The next watershed moment is the incorporation of FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018, opening a legal chapter of institutional convergence that marks the end of time but not an attitude towards pre-2000 socio-political practices.

Insurgency in the Merged Districts (2001–2025)

Until 2001, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) were governed by the



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Frontier Crimes Regulation with minimal state control and governance through jirgas and elders. This delicate equilibrium was shattered following the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, after which Al-Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban and other militant groups moved into the tribal belt to take advantage of porous borders, rugged terrain and entrenched political and economic resentments. It was the rapid Islamization of Pakistani society, aided by religious seminaries and propaganda networks, which intensified radicalization to boost militant groups. The alliance comprised dozens of militant groups, which by 2007 had coalesced into an amalgamation called Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which began imposing its own version of Sharia, striking at local power structures and establishing Qazi courts in parallel to the state. Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group (in North Waziristan): This group continued to observe a selective truce with the Pakistan government and support transnational jihadist operations.

Its counterterrorism campaigns have done harm for large militant infrastructure Al-Mizan, Rah-e-Nijat (2009), Zarb-e-Azb (2014),¹ but caused displacement of over million and destruction of key facilities especially after all leaders moved to Afghanistan. The most formidable surface-to-air missile defence system depress the Army aviation in battle space and can detect, track, engage, and destroy enemy aircraft virtually on anywhere within their weapons' ranges. The region remains insecure and the main causes of insecurity in this context are recurring cross-border infiltration, inadequate administrative integration and limited employment.

Fractionalization of Militant Groups in the Merged Districts

The fall out of 9/11 and the subsequent U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 prompted some important security transitions in Pakistan's now-invalidated Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). But, with the fall of Taliban regime, Al-Qaeda operatives and Afghan fighters flocked into rugged porous border belts professionally-well facilitated by tough terrain as well as low presence of law-enforcement agencies of the state. This, along with longstanding local grievances, paved the way for groups such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Islam and Ansar-ul-Islam. As a result of tribal discord, the convergence of religious seminaries and absence or ineffectiveness of governance, various militant groups were able to exploit these weaknesses as a means to project power; they effectively dominated large segments, inflicting defeat upon traditional tribal leadership by establishing their own version of Sharia law thereby replacing customary local governance.

Al-Qaedas involvement included both strategic and ideological elements, al-Qaeda operated in a coordinating capacity as well as providing expertise of training, funding, propaganda capabilities while internationalizing the insurgency by introducing advanced insurgent tactics such as IEDS (Improvised explosive device) and suicide bombings. In 2007 the TTP was established as an umbrella organization of more than 40 militant factions and it aimed to impose their version of Sharia law on Pakistan and oust the Pakistani government. The TTP carried out attacks against security personnel, schools and colleges, the jirgas which convened to seek resolution of disputes according to traditional law, and tribal elders. They established numerous 'sharia' courts in Jamrud tehsil (area) where verdicts on criminal cases were announced by the Qazi (Islamic Judge). Extortion and smuggling replaced other sources of income that had been destroyed by military operations since 2008.

In contrast, the regionally focused Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group (HGB) in North Waziristan leaned more towards local cooperation. There has been some debate as to whether Pakistan deliberately avoided direct military confrontation with Pakistani forces while providing



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support and safe havens to the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda. It brokered intermittent ceasefires with the government, controlled smuggling routes, enforced ad-hoc Sharia rule, and taxed a pivotal upsurge in cross-border militancy. Although they lost territory to major military operations such as the 2009 "Operation Rah-e-Nijat" and the 2014 "Operation Zarb-e-Azb", by the latter half of this decade these groups had regenerated, shifting their emphasis from territorial control to guerrilla warfare, where their criminal enterprises continued well into the 24th century.

Counterterrorism Operations and State Response

Position The rise and consolidation of militancy in the merged districts such as it is provides a case study to plumb worldwide cohesion among Al-Qaeda, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, and the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group. Role Three distinct entities remain separate yet connected through diverse operatives Defined philosophies Vast covert infrastructure Contributing to the weakened security fabric of the region and existing within wholly unique sets of systems contrasted against one another were these youthful actors who had each waged tactics in dismantling traditional tribal governing mechanisms, while asserting influence over locally and very specific communities across areas.

Al-Qaeda quickly infiltrated the mountainous tribal belt after the United States led an invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. The top leadership including Osama bin Laden fled to the mountainous, wooded hills of tribal areas that were hard to access and already had a loose border with Afghanistan which became porous due to our historical mistakes at least once in the past. The constant theme in all this is that more than merely fighting, al-Qaeda became a nursery for ideology and grandfatherly guidance; nurturing and training emerging local militant factions. Via an extensive network of madrassas, secret propaganda cells and covert recruiting routes, Al-Qaeda influenced a generation of tribal youth in the merged districts. Its game plan was to get local insurgencies with global aspirations making the gripes of tribal autonomy and political enfranchisement into a jihadist jargon. Al-Qaeda's presence also heightened the sophistication of militant tactics, popularizing improvised explosive devices, coordinated suicide bombings, and spectacular assaults on military strongholds.

The organization's ideological influence was pivotal in shaping the initial doctrinal framework of the TTP, ensuring the movement would not merely be a localized uprising but part of a worldwide jihadist cause established in December 2007 by Baitullah Mehsud (who was killed on August 5, 2009), the TTP served as an umbrella alliance comprising more than forty militant groups representing various factions operating in Pakistan's tribal agencies. It originally sought to implement sharia in Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal and settled districts, and wage armed struggle against the Pakistani state for its support of U.S.-led action in Afghanistan. It was the TTP who translated Al-Qaedas ideological instructions into hyper-localized revolt, taking on combat not only against state security forces but also against schools, medical staff, tribal seniors and political activists. The group proceeded to dismantle tribal governance structures on a vast scale by killing hundreds of maliks and replaced jirga-based dispute resolution with their own parallel sharia courts. It highlighted how female education was forbidden, hundreds of schools destroyed and it imposed strict social engagement rules. While Al-Qaeda had an internationalist perspective, the TTP was much more preoccupied with establishing itself as a semi-sovereign entity within the merged districts and beyond into adjacent settled districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Deploying a range of extortion, taxation and smuggling routes the TTP constructed its finances on a far more solid base. Nevertheless, large-scale military operations like Operation Rah-e-Nijat (2009) and Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014)



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saw it getting weakened in its territorial space to the extent that much of its leadership shifted to Afghanistan. Then it turned towards guerrilla-style warfare with the groups conducting cross border raids and assassinations, enabling them to continue their insurgency well into the 2020s.

The highly ambiguous and strategic nature of the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group in North Waziristan also demanded a separate focus. Under the leadership of senior Afghan jihadi commander Hafiz Gul Bahadur, TTP avoided direct confrontation with Islamabad in line with the traditional South Waziristan Taliban (resisting a foreign military presence in Afghanistan and maintaining a more nationalistic resistance agenda focused on Pakistan's military). This policy resulted in two ceasefires with Islamabad in 2006 and 2008 under the cover of not striking Pakistani forces. Though the collective was neutral, that neutrality was selective without engaging in large-scale combat, it provided safe haven, logistical support and operational coordination to Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda operatives. It bolstered its bastions in North Waziristan, which became a key cross-border insurgency centre. Backed by control of trade routes, taxation of goods and, when possible sharia rule in an area; they held sway.

Societal Effect of Militancy and Counterterrorism in Ex-Fata

There are numerous people who have been dislocated internally because the prolonged conflict in the merged districts, formerly known as FATA post 2018, is one of Pakistan's largest internal displacement crises. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reports over 5 million people displaced by military operations against insurgent groups between 2005 and 2017. Large scale military operations for restoration of peace like Zarb-e-Azb & Radd-ul-Fasaad have played havoc with the social fabric around the region. Families had to abandon their ancestral homes and means of livelihood, fleeing to overcrowded IDP camps situated in districts like Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan and Kohat.

Merged Districts: Militancy & Counterterrorism Impact on Economy

Economically deprived, these districts have been the worst-hit by militancy and counterterrorism operations. The village was known as a hotbed of violence and insecurity, with many residents who made their living off of farming the area. Displacement, they lost lands and labor, markets were closed as well as trade routes...and cross-border Indian-Afghan trades stopped working all of a sudden. The destruction of infrastructure, particularly roads, marketplaces and communications networks further complicated economic recovery efforts and the distribution of humanitarian relief. The widespread underdevelopment it thereby caused deterred investment, discouraging any further development project there ahead that only improved the backdrop to market trees whilst media reports left long unemployed and pockets of poverty. On top of that, with the social vulnerabilities further-compounded by economic hardships recovery was Left almost seemingly impossible. Perpetuating a cycle of violence that hampers progress towards sustainable development and peace, these situations have also sometimes provided openings for militant group recruitment.

Implications for Educational and healthcare systems in the amalgamated districts.

The conflict and military interventions ravaged the education and healthcare system in the merged districts. Extremist bans and war destroyed or forcibly closed thousands of schools – setting back girls' education. Communities and educators were also displaced which resulted in a break in schooling for numerous children, leading to education deprivation and further exacerbated the dropout rates. Such reversals imperil the growth and prospects



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of young people in that area for generations.

The healthcare infrastructure was equally badly hit, in particular the clinics and hospitals which were destroyed or not operational due to safety reasons such as security concerns and force displacement. Shortages of medical staff, lack of medicines and disrupted health services have led to deteriorating health outcomes as seen by increased child-maternal mortality, raise in preventable diseases etc. There is also difficulty restoring education and healthcare, anything due to lack of resources and fear of insecurity; thus forcing local populations to obtain services as and when they can in their communities.

Degradation of cultural identity and heritage

The long-drawn strife and counterinsurgency campaigns in the newly merged districts have significantly damaged the ancient, culturally vibrant yet resilient social fabric of the region. Traditionally, the indigenous custom of Pashtunwali helped manage socially accepted norms and mores in the tribal belt; it supported a powerful sense of community identity via establishments like hujra (traditional communal place where men gathered) jirgas (councils that resolved disputes) and revered tribal elders. But then reliance upon their doctrines was deliberately misplaced by a series of militant factions such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Islam and outsiders allied with Al-Qaeda that used the radical interpretations of religion to challenge well-aged local norms by systematically targeting them. These militant groups routinely attacked music, arts and cultural events as non-religious which led to a stifling of cultural expression and considerable damage to infrastructure. Hujras were vacated if not bombed, jirgas replaced by militant courts, and loyal tribal elders killed or thrown out. The acts managed to suppress cultural landmarks as well as create apprehension and fear that obstructed an ongoing intergenerational process of ethos reenactment, and oral tradition. The military environment intensified by mass migrations splintered tribal oneness encouraging sharp decline in cultural regeneration, recovery and revival.

Conclusion

The fact of the matter is that 24 years of continuous militancy and counterterrorism operation in Pakistan's former FATA under new merged districts has significantly changed the social, cultural, and economic aspect of these areas. Violence has degraded traditional tribal governance systems and social cohesion, leading massed injuries. Although counterterrorism has succeeded in reinstating the authority of the state and neutralizing networks of militants, it has also come at a high cost: livelihoods have been interrupted; public services stretched to their limits; and young people mentally scarred for life. The accelerating loss of communal trust in the society is also inhibiting joint decision-making which has further deprived the Jirga system from its original leverage. Because of restrictions on traditional practices and loss of heritage physically and culturally, local identity is often morphed. This has made us poorer in economic terms by destroying our infrastructure, shrinking the market. Reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts are already taking place; however, to be successful they need continued investment, a comprehensive governance model which includes community buy in, designed for long-term sustainability. Sustainable peace in the merged districts is contingent on addressing the underlying causes of militancy: socio-economic disenfranchisement, political exclusion and poor service delivery. The best practices from this ongoing 20-year struggle is that security operations in isolation are worthless and securing a lasting stability must have sociocultural as well ortho-economic support to play. Balanced, equitable and development-focused measures would be the only way to ensure that merged districts are



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truly rehabilitated and have a role in wider peace and development of Pakistan.

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