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## Invaders from the North and Fear of Taliban Taking Control of Pakistan

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## **Invaders from North and Fear of Taliban Taking Control of Pakistan**

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**Invaders from the North never really stopped:** Ever since the middle ages, the plains of the Indian Sub-continent have been the happy hunting grounds of successive waves of organized bands of marauders from Central Asia. They came basically with a view to loot and plunder, and then go back laden with booty to their impoverished hills, and rag-a-tag settlements, and a few years later, some local chief would organize them again, and travel through the Khyber Pass for yet another fray. Some stayed back, and founded empires in India, which were vibrant for a generation or more, but then the agricultural fecundity of the area, and the hot climate got to them, making them rich, and consequently indolent. They in a generation or three ended up as sitting ducks to be cleaned out by bands of desperate men, who had little to lose except their lives. And so the cycle kept repeating itself for a thousand years. To avert this oft-repeated mayhem, some rulers of India attempted to check it by building defensive systems in the northwest. But these were half hearted at best and generally ineffective. So the raids from Central Asia continue, and continue to date.

Among these conquerors of India, the exceptions were the British, who came and went back by sea routes. The British never intended to settle in the subcontinent from day one, and their sole aim was the enrichment of Mother England. So what they did was to find political accommodation with the powers in the north-west. Compromise is cheaper than conflict.

This is the gist of Indian history in 250 words.

**Post-partition scenario:** This well known pattern went out of sync with the self-rule granted to the people of India by the British in 1947. The elected representatives of the NWFP voted against joining the State of Pakistan, whereas in a referendum which was ordered, the people of the NWFP including those residing in the present day FATA voted to be part of this country. At that time the Governor General of the young country agreed that the laws and customary systems of governance shall not be amended in any manner. The FATA tribesmen took part in the Kashmir operations of 1948, and generally continued to be a favorite of the establishment, because they asked for nothing in return for being left alone to get on with their rather primitive way of life. In addition, they guarded the western border which, called the Durand Line, provided the establishment in Pakistan with much flawed policy of “strategic depth.”

**(and) the Soviet invasion:** Therefore, a tacit accommodation continued till the then USSR invaded Afghanistan in the 1970s, and the Pakistan Government felt extremely uneasy fearing that this country would be next in line as it was in the way of the Russian advance to the warm waters. (*Recently released government papers in Moscow debunk this fear, as at that point in time there was no plan to invade Pakistan*). Pakistan liaised with comrade-in-arm USA, and mounted a huge effort since titled the Afghan Jihad. The Russians were driven out from Afghanistan, but the war tore asunder the FATA area which just happened to be in the forefront because of its geographical location. To motivate the youngster to become warriors, the GOP-USG decided to play the Islamic Card. They quietly confiscated political power from the tribal elders who had kept things from falling apart for decades, and created a class of even more powerful Mullahs. Most of the old-time Malikhs have since been killed and political power in the FATA today is in the blood-stained talons of the worst kind of fascist oligarchs. The State of Pakistan and her Western allies share the responsibility of creating the Frankenstein called militant and violent Jihadist.

**Quick rundown on Taliban:** The Taliban initially was a set of impoverished Afghan youth who were taken in as internally displaced persons along with the other three million who took refuge in Pakistan after the invasion of Afghanistan by the Russians. These young men, and women, were trained in the religious laws, and indoctrinated to return to Afghanistan and fight and drive out the “pagans.” So, a quasi-political party was born which took over the southern part of Afghanistan after the retreat of the USSR consequent to the Geneva Accords of 1988. The Taliban government in Afghanistan is distinguished for the brutality with which it established their writ. Such was the cruel dispensation that even Nadir Shah, famed in the annals of history as a tyrant, would have been aghast. The Taliban regime was recognized only by three countries viz. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The Taliban rule in Afghanistan was harsher than any other that the hapless country had seen before, and she had seen many tyrants, despots, and similarly unstable rulers. The Taliban went into a frenzy of public executions, stoning to death, arbitrary imprisonment, and public lashings. They created kangaroo courts, gave out special laws edicts. The rights of women and children were trampled underfoot, and a feared regime established in a few months. The country became a safe haven for Al-Qaeda, and thousands of young males who came in to strengthen the hands of the Taliban, who had

purportedly liberated a citadel of Islam from the “godless Russians” and “evil empire.” These young males were from all over the Islamic world, and Central Asia. They were valued guests of the regime, lived in style, married into local families, and over the years, became “local.”

This in short establishes the profile and pedigree of the present day tormentors called Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

**Post September 11, 2001:** By the time 9/11 happened, the regime in Afghanistan was in control and very rich from all kind of smuggling and trafficking, which they legitimized through fatwa as legitimate trade. Large amounts of money came from the Middle East, both state and private funds. At this time, the Americans attacked, and Pakistan withdrew its support. The regime crumpled like a house of cards without offering any resistance. The Taliban were regular visitors to the FATA area, and many had families and homes here. The Durand Line was the divide between safety or death, and therefore, the leadership of the Taliban, and many al-Qaeda elements sought refuge in our FATA. They brought with them large funds, international connections, and a lot of heavy armament.

This amalgam gave rise to two distinct movements:

1. One was the TTP which decided to take revenge from the State of Pakistan for abandoning their cousins to the Americans
2. Others who organized to go back and reclaim its kingdom in Afghanistan.

The former are mainly attacking the institutions of the State of Pakistan, while the latter are training, regrouping, and making hit and run raids on US and Allied Forces inside Afghanistan.

**Taliban’s geographical control and governance methodology:** The TTP has had resounding success as it indirectly controls or influences nearly 50% of the NWFP. The seven agencies of the FATA and the seven districts of Malakand Division are more or less run by the various chapters of the TTP. This ascendancy was facilitated by the MMA government which ruled the NWFP from 2003 to 2008. The TTP rules through fear and what they did was replicate the Taliban tactics of governance in Afghanistan and now hold sway over a cowering population abandoned by the State of Pakistan. Decapitations, headless bodies hanging from poles, whipping in public and similar acts of brutality are commonplace. Any departure from edicts issued by the high command is swiftly and surely punished.

**(but) Taliban still cannot take over Islamabad:** The TTP cannot “occupy” Islamabad and Pakistan because:

1. The control they exercise in the FATA and Malakand is forced. At any time that their critical mass explodes, the tribal Lashkars will come and drive them underground. This has happened recently.
2. Political control is ensured when the urban centers fall and Taliban do not have the numbers and the capacity to become strong enough to “invade” further down South.
3. Guerrilla warfare is successful in rural areas and the terrain that of FATA and Swat. Towns and large cities are defended better.
4. The TTP is hated by the vast majority of Pakistanis, and this they know. They may carry out terrorist activities here and there but they cannot get themselves organized.
5. Islamabad is very important to world powers and the General Headquarter of Pakistan Army. Both of these will not permit any symbolic demise of and challenge to the political and constitutional power that the Federal Capital is all about.

**Food for thought:** Pakistan has become a highly militarized society since 1979. For 21 years until 2001, the State’s security and intelligence apparatus systematically supported the Wahabi school of thought as this segment within Islam provided the *Mujahideen* against *infidels*. Wahabis and their closest ideological brothers, Deobandis, have the biggest network of mosques and Madrasas in all major towns of Pakistan. If the Lal Masjid in Islamabad is any example to go by, these places of worship are expected to be heavily armed. So the TTP which is somehow connected to these mosques can have a great deal of civic disturbance created. This could only be prevented with a unified security policy that goes beyond the “bullet in the barrel” and involves politics backed by strong economic mainstreaming. Another reason for Taliban’s “success” is the hunger, poverty and deprivation of the areas where they operate. The Pakistani State and its Western allies must bear in mind that hungry, poor and deprived people *cannot* be happy people.