

THE ROLE OF ANTI-TALIBAN LASHKAR (ARMED MILITIA) IN PREVENTION OF TERRORISM IN CONFLICT AFFECTED AREAS

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims at investigating the role of Pakhtun's traditional institution called Lashkar (armed militia) in peace making at conflict affected communities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. For this purpose, Data were collected through a structured interview schedule from a sample of 278 household members in four selected villages of Dir Upper and Dir Lower Districts. A Chi square test was applied to ascertain association between different aspects of independent variable Lashkar with dependent variable the state of peace in the study area. It was found that the presence of Lashkar in the area has a significant association with state of peace in the area. The role of Lashkar in pushing out militants from the area, maintaining control, provision of safety and security to local people were the main significant aspects related to peace in the area. On the other hand, a non-significant association was noted between the state of peace with provision of arms to Lashkar by government and Lashkar as a symbol of peace in the area. It is concluded that in the face of external aggression Lashkar is playing a vital role the security of community but it is not considered as a whole the symbol of peace and the government should not facilitate provision of arms to local people.

Keywords: *Lashkar, Terrorism, Pakhtun Society, Aman Lashkar, Jirga System*

INTRODUCTION

In the current waves of global terrorism, security and law and order issues are indispensable to every society throughout the globe. To ensure stability and harmony, contemporary societies have formal security and control apparatuses while pre modern societies have built-in cultural mechanism that is activated as a custom. Whenever there is external threat or internal imbalance, these mechanisms are triggered to ensure security and protection of the people. In rural societies, informal mechanisms are more effective and strong than formal one. Similarly, Pakhtoon Culture is full of such powerful indigenous control and peace building mechanisms in the form of *Jirga*, Peace Committees, *Lashkar*, *Nanawati*, etc. *Jirga* system is a thousand years ancient tradition with matchless abilities for dispute settlements in the *Pukhtoon* belt of Pakistan and Afghanistan. This archetype operates in *Pakhtoon* society handling individual and community matters in a way acceptable to them (Yousafzai and Gohar, 2005). *Jirga* acts like a judiciary but for execution of its decisions or in the wake of any external onslaught it also activates the community military force called *Lashkar* (armed militia). *Lashkar* is the fighting force which is raised by taking one or two young persons from each house or a group of house and is kept under the control of elders of the tribe for the purpose of facing any eventuality from the opposite side (Afridi, 2003).

The current waves of militancy in Pakistan has largely effected Pakhtun areas of the country. Many areas of FATA and Malakand Division remained under the influence of Terrorist (Taliban). It posed serious security threats and protection concerns to the local inhabitants especially to government officials, liberal political leadership and highly education middle class of the society. In order to clear these areas from militants groups government took military operation in the area, the massive one was in 2009 which huge number of people were displaced from Dir and Swat of Malakand Division. Local people have always showed their concern on the issue and used their traditional institution and customary ways to clear the area from militants group. They hold on talks with local militants and government officials equally to avoid conflict. Local people efforts when compared with the non-local ones, local approaches of disputes settlements are simple, less time consuming and providing opportunities of participation to the parties in conflict for resolving their matters in an acceptable way (Abebe, n.d).

Local leaders' weather political, religious or community influential also have a strong hold and influence the peace building process (Honwana 2005). Daily Dawn (2009) reported that in a *Jirga* of the elders of 25 communities in Dir Upper call the administration to capture the fleeting miscreants or permit the *Lashkar* for taking actions against them. Local Peace Committees (LPCs): voluntary councils of village elders were formed to ensure stability and keep eyes on subversive activities in areas. Similarly, in Dir and Bajor agency of FATA, *Lashkar* were also introduced by local people to fight back with active militants present in the area. This tendency of *anti-Taliban lashkars* began from Buner district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa when the local people pursued and executed a clutch of six miscreants. A leading member of the *Lashkar* in Bajor agency said that houses of militants were destroyed by *Lashkar* including the house of *Niamatullah*, who had converted many government educational institutions into seminaries (Khan, 2013). Daily Dawn (2009) Sources claimed that in Dir Upper *Lashkar* is getting the anticipated progress and very much hopeful to defeat the militants soon. More volunteers are joining the *lashkar* to take revenge of the militant for a deadly explosion in the mosques in which 49 local people including children killed. This study is therefore an attempt to assess the role of Anti-Taliban Lashkar in culminating militancy in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to know about Lashkar's Role in elimination of militancy in the selected conflict affected areas. District Dir Upper and District Dir Lower was the universe of the study as insurgents were found in many areas of both the districts. Since, the villages that had insurgents were more in number, so, data for the present study were collected from four villages, two from of each district i.e. Samkot and Dog Payeen from Upper Dir and Gedaro and Brekanai from Lower Dir. A sample size of 278 was determined using table given by Sikaran (2003) from a total population of 982. Proportionate sampling method was used to determine the sample size for each village whereas systematic sampling method was applied to pick the samples from the four selected villages. The distribution of sample respondents to each village is as in Table. I

Table. I Sample Size

S. No	Name of the Selected Village	Household Statistics	Sample Size
1	Gedaro	202	57
2	Brekanai	304	86
3	Samkot	259	73
4	Dog Payen	217	62
Total		982	278

A well thought interview schedule, based on likert scale, was devised to obtain relevant information from the respondents on the issue at hand. Data were analyzed using SPSS 20 version. A Chi square test was used to measure association between dependent variable i.e. the state of peace in the area and independent variable i.e. various aspects of Lashkar.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mostly, the documented mantle of Lashkar can be found in shape of its role in controlling internal aggression in community and to fight with any external aggressors. The Anti Taliban Lashkar is a new phenomenon arose after the increased threat of Talibanization in Pakhhtun society. That is why we can find very little research studies on the role of Lashkar in prevention of militancy. Mostly, available literature on the issue is news reports or documented interviews.

In recent insurgency in Pakhtoon belt, *lashkar* has been formed in many areas such as Dir, Khyber agency and Bajour Agency etc. It has played an effective role in elimination of militants' presence in the area which has been reported widely. In some areas, these *lashkars* "have been re-titled "peace committees" or "Aman (peae) Lashkar, to shun link with extremist clutches such as the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* and *Lashkar-e-Tayyaba*. Irrespective of the tag modification, *lashkars* remain state-supported militias, given the task of countering miscreants (Asia Report No. 242, 2013). The leading tribes from Upper Dir District through a *Jirga* of 800 notables of the area unanimously announced to establish a local *Lashkar*, encompassing 20,000 youngsters, to expel militants from the area (Latif, 2008).

The *Qaumi lashkar* comprising armed combatants has effectively vacated most of the villages where militants were present, leaving 34 terrorists dead. The *Qaumi lashkar* is capturing the area where the Taliban supporters had taken the local people hostage at gunpoint. The miscreants have now been holed up in Shortkas, Ghazigay and Dogdarra areas (Daily The News, 2009).

Yousafzai (2013) stated that Bajaur Agency government gave weapons to *anti-Taliban lashkars* (peace committees) in response to targeted killings, officials said. "The people are standing up to the Taliban in the area because they want peace and progress," political agent Syed Abdul Jabbar Shah told Central Asia Online. "Upon the repeated requests of the residents, we have revitalized the *anti-Taliban lashkars* throughout the agency to maintain peace. We are giving them with weapons and other equipment." With those *lashkars'* help, more than 7,000 militants have surrendered to the authorities since 2008. The *local lashkar* has also given considerable power as in August 2012 at Malam Jaba Swat, the Army officers directed the local *lashkar* to mark the house with white or coloured flags to label them as friend or foe in order to avoid a potential threat from local militants (Asia Report No. 242, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section comprised of the results derived from analysis and a discussion based on relevant literature and the researchers own field experiences. Results of the study are presented in Table II, which present the association of different factors of Lashkar with state of peace through application of Chi-square statistics. A significant association was found between the *lashkar* role in taking control of the area ($P = .016$) and Lashkar pushed militants out of the area ($P = .000$) with the state of peace in the area. Similarly the state of peace in the area was found significantly associated with factors such as *lashkar* provided safety and security to the local people ($P = .000$), villager provide volunteers from family member ($P = .044$), *lashkar* provided protection to public buildings like schools, hospitals etc. ($P = .031$), and *lashkar* work in the coordination of law enforcement agencies ($P = .005$). On the other hand a non-significant association was found between the state of peace and the factors such as *lashkar* have positively contributed in peace of the area ($P = .059$), *lashkar* patrolling at night ($P = .193$), government provision of arms to the *lashkar* ($P = .945$), *lashkar* as a symbol of community unity ($P = .112$), and keeping an eye on the subversive

activities by Lashkar ($P= .115$) with state of peace in the area. *Lashkar* is a force which is constituted by providing one or two young persons from every house or group of houses in the community and is under the control of a community elder (Afridi, 2003). It has played an active role in recent insurgency in Pakhtun belt and its presence is being reported widely (Asia Report No. 242, 2013). The study also found that people positive attitude towards formation of *laskhar* ($p .036$) has a relationship with the state of peace in the area. Latif (2008) articulated that in Upper Dir the leading tribes formed a *lashkar* of 20,000 youth to purge miscreants out of the area. This was the reason army could not carry out any operation against Taliban in Dir Upper. The local people were against army operation and they took themselves the responsibility of clearing the area from Taliban.

Lashkar played role in taking control of the area from militant ($P= .016$) and pushing militants out of the area ($P=.000$) have significant association with peace of the area. Likewise findings were reported in The News (2009) that Upper Dir *Qaumi lashkar* cleared majority of the area from militants and leaving 34 terrorist dead. Similarly, the state of peace in the area was found significantly associated with *lashkar* provision of safety and security to the local people ($P= .000$) which is also reported by Khan (2013) that in Bunir District local member of a *lashkar* chased 6 militants and killed them while in Bajour Agency volunteers of local *lashkar* destroyed houses of militants. Further, *lashkar* provided protection to public buildings like schools, hospitals etc. ($P=.031$) is also having strong relation with peace as claimed by Yousafzai (2013) that people in Bajour made *anti-Taliban lashkar* for peace and security of the area evacuated the local schools from militants.

It was found that provision of volunteers to Lashkar from family members ($P=.044$) has a significant association peace as noted that *lashkar* is getting the desired results and more and more villagers joining the *lashkar* to punish militants who carried out a deadly suicide attack in the mosque in Dir Upper (Dawn, 2009). Similarly, *Lashkar* work in the coordination of law enforcement agencies ($P=.005$) has strong association with peace. In some areas law enforcement agencies directed people to form *lashkar* such as in September 2012 military official directed the local *lashkar* to mark houses with white or colored flags to designate them as pal or foe respectively (Asia Report No. 242, 2013). On the other hand a non-significant association was found between the people views weather Lashakar has positively contributed for peace ($P= .059$) with state of peace in the area. It could be because

lashkar was not formed in all of the selected study villages. In some villages local people have formed peace committees which are non armed and use non violent means for maintaining peace. Importance of *lashkar* patrolling at night ($P= .193$), and government provision of arms to the *lashkar* ($P= .945$) were found non-significantly related to peace. It means that people of the area are not in favour of government to provide arms to the local people or members of the *lashkar* who then do patrolling at night like police. It might be correct to say that *lashkar* can not substitute police or army in conflict affected areas.

Moreover, a non-significant association was recorded on *lashkar* is a symbol of community unity ($P= .112$) and keeping in an eye on the subversive activities in the area ($P= .115$) with state of peace in the area. It means that Lashkar can act as a fighting force and have nothing to do with keeping eyes on society. Most of the members of Lashkar are youngster who are lacking such experience and fold wisdom. Jirga or community elders are such people who have the required knowledge and experience of keeping insight on the community affairs. In another study conducted by Ahmad et. al. (2013) in the same area revealed that LPCs are more effective in keeping eyes on the subversive activities and working with coordination in law enforcement agencies for identification of miscreant.

Table II. Role of Armed *Lashkar* (militia) in Peace Building-

Statement	State of Peace in the area			Chi Square P Value	
	Yes	No	Don't Know		
Formation of <i>lashkar</i> is still a good idea in the recent conflict	Yes	95(34.2%)	28(10.1%)	10(3.6%)	10.271 ^a $P= .036$
	No	58(20.9%)	26(9.4%)	7(2.5%)	
	Don't Know	29(10.4%)	14(5.0%)	11(4.0%)	
<i>Lashkar</i> have positively contributed in peace of the area	Yes	100(36.0%)	35(12.6%)	17(6.1%)	9.083 ^a $P= .059$
	No	57(20.5%)	17(6.1%)	3(1.1%)	
	Don't Know	25(9.0%)	16(5.8%)	8(2.9%)	
<i>Lashkar</i> played role in taking control of the area	Yes	96(34.5%)	29(10.4%)	13(4.7%)	12.153 ^a $P= .016$
	No	59(21.2%)	23(8.3%)	4(1.4%)	
	Don't Know	27(9.7%)	16(5.8%)	11(4.0%)	
<i>Lashkar</i> Pushed millitants out of the area	Yes	94(33.8%)	20(7.2%)	7(2.5%)	28.839 ^a $P= .000$
	No	60(21.6%)	31(11.2%)	6(2.2%)	
	Don't Know	28(10.1%)	17(6.1%)	15(5.4%)	
<i>Lashkar</i> Provided safety and security to the local people	Yes	92(33.1%)	18(6.5%)	7(2.5%)	20.301 ^a $P= .000$
	No	55(19.8%)	30(10.8%)	8(2.9%)	
	Don't Know	35(12.6%)	20(7.2%)	13(4.7%)	
Villager provide volunteers from family member because of	Yes	101(36.3%)	27(9.7%)	11(4.0%)	9.803 ^a $P= .044$

their own security	No	51(18.3%)	22(7.9%)	7(2.5%)	
	Don't Know	30(10.8%)	19(6.8%)	10(3.6%)	
Patrolling of the <i>lashkar</i> at night is important	Yes	96(34.5%)	26(9.4%)	10(3.6%)	6.077 ^a P= .193
	No	47(16.9%)	23(8.3%)	9(3.2%)	
	Don't Know	39(14.0%)	19(6.8%)	9(3.2%)	
<i>Lashkar</i> provided protection to public buildings like schools, hospitals etc.	Yes	115(41.4%)	31(11.2%)	15(5.4%)	10.659 ^a P= .031
	No	40(14.4%)	15(5.4%)	6(2.2%)	
	Don't Know	27(9.7%)	22(7.9%)	7(2.5%)	
Govt should provide arms to the <i>lashkar</i>	Yes	90(32.4%)	30(10.8%)	14(5.0%)	.748 ^a P= .945
	No	51(18.3%)	21(7.6%)	7(2.5%)	
	Don't Know	41(14.7%)	17(6.1%)	7(2.5%)	
<i>Lashkar</i> work in the coordination of law enforcement agencies	Yes	101(36.3%)	24(8.6%)	10(3.6%)	14.747 ^{ab} P= .005
	No	38(13.7%)	24(8.6%)	5(1.8%)	
	Don't Know	43(15.5%)	20(7.2%)	13(4.7%)	
It's a sign of community towards external threat	Yes	100(36.0%)	30(10.8%)	10(3.6%)	7.490 ^a P= .112
	No	37(13.3%)	12(4.3%)	6(2.2%)	
	Don't Know	45(16.2%)	26(9.4%)	12(4.3%)	
<i>Lashkar</i> Keep an eye on the subversive activities in the area	Yes	100(36.0%)	29(10.4%)	11(4.0%)	7.432 ^a P= .115
	No	41(14.7%)	19(6.8%)	5(1.8%)	
	Don't Know	41(14.7%)	20(7.2%)	12(4.3%)	

CONCLUSION

The idea of traditional *lashkar* is still prevalent in Pakhtun culture as many areas has activated their local *lashkar* to fight against Taliban. It has its successes in taking control of the area and pushing out criminal elements from community. It provides a sense of security and protection to local people from threats of Taliban attacks. It has taken on the role of community policing by providing protection to public buildings like schools and hospitals etc. It also has a government support but the local people are not in favor of arming the local *lashkar* by government. In some areas it has taken the shape of peace committees or aman (peace) *Lashkar* which work in coordination with Law enforcement agencies by providing them relevant support and information. It is a best kind of indigenous support from local people to national counter terrorism plan. It is suggested that its fighting role needs to be reduced as it cannot substitute state apparatus for social control.

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