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THE STRATEGY OF WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS: AN EVALUATION

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Abstract
After 9/11, Pakistan joined the United States in combating terrorism. However, after entering into an alliance for the Global War on Terror (GWOT) with the U.S., numerous internal security threats adversely impacted the security of civilians, particularly in the tribal areas of the country. This paper examines how organisations such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban mobilised people's support by embracing cultural endowment and ethereal beliefs that the local people had, and how the Pakistan Army neutralised these tactics. In the realm of civil-military operations and their subsequent stabilisation and reconstruction, the Army intended to remove terrorists from their existing territories and regain the trust of the communities. This paper aims to analyse the strategy of "winning hearts and minds" (WHAM) used by the Pakistan Army throughout the war on terror. The assessment of WHAM also examines various education and community awareness projects, media, and healthcare facilities. Lastly, it evaluates the effectiveness at the tactical level and the citizens' perception of these endeavours and suggests the following strategic plans to increase security and stability in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

There is no national consensus over whether Pakistan's decision to join hands against the war on terrorism with the United States was the right decision or not. However, Pakistan's role in the war on terror is internationally recognised. After the incident of 9/11, the U.S. decided to wage war against Al-Qaeda and called for world leaders to team up against the menace of terrorism. During President Bush's speech at Congress, in a hegemonic tone, he asserted his message to the world leaders, "You are either with terrorists or with us."

This was an indication of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan under the umbrella of the War on Terrorism, because without any conclusive evidence and investigation, the U.S. leadership quickly blamed Afghanistan for providing a haven to Al-Qaeda. However, to invade Afghanistan and to initiate the operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. needed a right hand in South Asia. India wanted to play this role, but the U.S. opted for Pakistan due to its geographical proximity to Afghanistan. At the time, Pakistan had no choice as the Bush Administration warned that "Pakistan would be bombed to the Stone Age if it did not participate in the U.S.-led war against terrorism."

Pakistan assisted the U.S. with both kinetic and non-kinetic means of warfare. As a result of this assistance, Pakistan faced some serious repercussions. The Taliban and Al-Qaida took the opportunity to penetrate the tribal areas of Pakistan and claimed that they wanted to impose Sharia law in Pakistan. Pakistan's internal security came under significant threat because of the Mujahedin, as they were referred to during the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union, turned to take revenge on the U.S., and are also targeting

Pakistan because of its support for the US in the War on Terrorism.

This study will delve into the designs used by Al-Qaeda and the Taliban to manipulate the people of tribal areas adjoining Afghanistan to take up arms against Pakistani forces. Pakistan faced a two-front war; the U.S. forced Pakistan to do more and also to start operations within its territory, and hence, in 2002, the Pakistan Army initiated a series of operations to fight the terrorists in the tribal region. Furthermore, this research will evaluate the use of the concept of winning hearts and minds from a historical perspective by the Pakistan Army to eliminate the factors that radicalised the tribal areas. Importantly, this paper will explore future strategic initiatives that will pave the way for a more secure and peaceful Pakistan.

Literature Review

Pakistan played a pivotal role in the U.S.-led global war against terrorism. Throughout the war, the Pakistan Army provided hard power to the U.S. and also hosted them at their air bases. Moreover, on the diplomatic front, Pakistan endorsed all the U.S. initiatives to wage war against terrorism. The Pakistan Army's unwavering commitment and sacrifices in this war are a testament to its resilience and dedication. However, due to its geographical location, Pakistan had to face the effects of the war on its soil. The terrorist groups entered the tribal regions of Pakistan and targeted the innocent people to gain sympathy.

Feyyaz was of the view that "in the context of terrorism, the best way to establish peace was to use the strategy of winning hearts and minds." Through the lens of constructivism, we can understand how norms, ideas, and values evolve and shape self-identity. Constructivism evaluates how states act within the system; they choose options that align with their interests. Constructivists also emphasise that security is paramount to our identities. With the collective action of the system, the idea of security can take on an aspect.

Following that, winning hearts and minds is a strategy that dates back to British imperialism. But in the contemporary world, this doctrine serves as a tool for counterinsurgency and to gain local support. The Pakistan Army had to face the enemy within during these operations. Raza explains how terrorist groups targeted different factions of society and exploited their religious beliefs to create a sectarian divide. Another study explores how people of tribal groups showcased resentment over military operations because of their affiliations with extremist organisations. Even madrasas were seized by the terrorist groups.

Moreover, another study discovered how education was affected under the influence of militant groups in South Waziristan. The authors discussed that Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan not only propagandised the masses but also destroyed the social structure. Students, especially girls, were not allowed to seek education. About 600 educational institutions were restricted from activities. However, the Pakistan Army not only successfully eradicated but also helped in the reconstruction. Shuja Nawaz's paper argues that the situation in the tribal areas worsened due to the lack of importance given to the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC). It was a result of negligence by political leaders. The presence of well-trained FCs could have curtailed the menace of extremism.

In contrast, Afridi examines how civil and military leadership addressed extremism in the tribal areas. This research inquired about the psychological operations and other strategies used by the Pakistan Army to deradicalise the area of FATA and PATA. Furthermore, quantitative research on the case study of military operations examined the role of Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), a media and public relations branch of the Pakistan Army, in narrative-building through various media tactics that swayed public opinion in favour of the forces and increased recruitment. ISPR played a significant role in shaping public perception of the War on Terror through its media campaigns and productions. Similarly, the study by Maleeha Rai and Dr Maryam Azam notes that ISPR productions generated a wave of patriotism among the public and shaped public perceptions

of the War on Terror. These productions also boosted morale and enabled the Pakistan Army to operate in its areas of operation. The public is influenced by the visuals they see and adopts the narrative portrayed to them. Goffman, in his work, articulated how frames play a significant role in the agenda-setting process and in shaping emotional and behavioural changes.

Additionally, the post-conference report of "In Pursuit of Peace" correspondingly mentioned the efforts of the Pakistan Army during and post-war on terrorism. The report cites the Pakistan Army's reconstruction activities. They have constructed several schools, colleges, health institutes, and training and facilitation centres for the locals. Furthermore, Samrez Salik emphasised that the Pakistan Army employed a strategy of winning hearts and minds through deradicalisation measures, social consensus, and economic and infrastructure development. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting published news that the government of Pakistan has announced "Operation Azm-e-Istehkam" to stop the resurgence of terrorism in Pakistan. The government also expressed appreciation for the Armed Forces and outlined the operational objectives.

Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research method to analyse the Pakistan Army's use of winning hearts and minds in the war on terror. It will also explore how terrorists exploited people of tribal areas, what strategic approaches the Pakistan Army used to regain the trust and support of the people, and the outcomes. The study relies on the psychological experiences of the actors involved; for that reason, the researcher preferred the qualitative method over the quantitative method.

The primary research was conducted through interviews. Some of the questions posed to the interviewees included: the Pakistan Army's defensive approach; the reaction of locals to in-place defence tactics; the effectiveness of these tactics; the need for such strategies during periods of peace; and whether these strategies should be 'audited' to improve effectiveness. The secondary research included books, journal articles, and conference reports. The books and journal articles were used to assess theoretical perspective and to understand the dynamics of the existing research. Furthermore, the documentaries Chiragh-e-rah" and " Shahbash Naujawan" published through the official website of ISPR are also used as a medium of secondary research. These documentaries cover the Pakistan Army's work in socio-economic development and the de-radicalisation of western borders.

Based on the interviews and proper secondary data collected, the data were subjected to thematic analysis. The analysis of the identified primary sources allowed the researcher to define several key themes regarding the strategic approaches.

Theoretical Precepts

1. **Constructivism**

Constructivism is a theory of International relations proposed by Nicholas Onuf in 1989. Constructivists believe that social behaviour shapes the system, and that states always make decisions based on self-interest. Consequently, the concept of security is contested because it is also a social construct. Another crucial factor that constructivists highlight is that identities are not fixed and that the concept of security is being shaped at the domestic level and can be changed through agents. Constructivists also evaluate the communication strategies used by political leaders to influence the thought process that will shape their identities.

This research work will explore the impacts of brainwashing on the tribal areas that manipulated their concept of security, and the efforts of the Pakistan Army to revamp the idea of security with the use of winning hearts and minds.

2. **Framing theory:**

Framing theory involves the process by which specific aspects of reality are presented to convey the desired meaning to the audience. Frames influence mental structures and thinking patterns through visuals, languages, colours, and other means of communication. The media, politicians,

and business and marketing professionals use framing theory. There are different types of frames, normative, emotional, and cognitive, used to exploit psychological impressions.

The study will highlight the use of framing theory by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), which published several series, songs, and documentaries throughout the war on terror. These publications highlighted the sacrifices of the armed forces and their efforts to secure the people's support.

The concept of winning hearts and minds (WHAM)

"Winning hearts and minds" is a versatile strategic tactic for gaining local support in political campaigns, social activities and military operations via sympathetic and persuasive means rather than coercion. A harmonious and effective society depends on this strategy that prioritises emotional and cognitive involvement. Recognising the public's needs, interests, and concerns helps military leaders and governments build trust and cooperation, which are essential to success. This strategy requires emotional and intellectual appeal, along with a deep understanding of human emotions and motivations, to go beyond mere persuasion. Only leaders with high emotional intelligence can better manage their society; the employment of this strategy is truly a leadership task. Leaders must take steps to establish effective policies for successful implementation.

Throughout history, many military operations have relied on this technique, demonstrating its importance and complexity. This technique originated in the late 19th and early 20thcentury. The British utilised the sandman method in Malaya to subjugate the Northwest Frontier Province and the Indian tribes. This technique co-opted tribal chiefs with incentives and integrated their power systems into the colonial authority. Current local hierarchies were used to maintain order at a low cost and with high effectiveness. This method maintained short-term stability but sometimes isolated tribes from the state, undermining long-term stability. This idea was also popular throughout the Vietnam War under the pacification programs. The US military sought South Vietnamese acceptance to counter the Viet Cong. Known as "winning hearts and minds," this strategy combined military and social efforts. Medical treatment, infrastructure development, and local government support were civil activities. Improving civilian living conditions and security reduced support for militants. Vietnam's people's hearts and minds faced enormous challenges despite these efforts. Corruption in the South Vietnamese government, misinterpretation of cultural norms, and the difficulties of winning over a population during an insurgency were major challenges. Furthermore, the leadership of the United States again opted to employ this strategy in Afghanistan during the war on terror. They invested in the social sector to gain local support as a counterinsurgency tool against guerrilla groups.

Indoctrination Campaigns

The terrorist groups of Taliban and Al-Qaeda used various tactics to influence the people of the tribal areas. After entering FATA in 2002, they exploited the strategic hospitality aspect of Pakhtunwali culture to secure "Panah" from the Armed Forces. This cultural norm, deeply ingrained in the local population, became a tool for the terrorists. When the locals realised this, they started resisting, and the terrorists responded by imposing terror to gain their support. Furthermore, they used psychological operations to target the religious sentiments of the people. They informed people that they intended to impose Sharia's teachings. To propagate this element, they targeted the education system; they stopped the children from seeking education. They imposed these restrictions by using force. In addition to this, terrorists used the madrasa to brainwash the children and recruit them into their groups. About eighteen per cent of Pakistan's madrasas were under their control. Later on, in 2009, these terrorist groups used websites to spread material to spread fear and disturbance in society. However, the Pakistan Army eliminated all these activities under the WHAM.

Implementation of WHAM: Target Areas and Strategies

The first courageous step taken by the Pakistan Army was to clear the area and eliminate the terrorists. The Pakistan Army initiated Operation Al-Mizan, Zalzala, and Tri-star in Swat, Mohmmad Agency, South Waziristan, and other parts of FATA from 2002 to 2008. The locals from these areas were moved to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps to protect them from the violence of the war. It was not easy for the locals to leave their homes and belongings in the conflict zone, but for the Pakistan Army, the safety of the civilians was the first and foremost task. In this realm, a large number of terrorists were eliminated, and tactical success was achieved. Then in 2009, the Pakistan Army executed three more critical operations, Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Haq and Rah-e-Nijat. These operations aimed to eradicate terrorist areas in South Waziristan, including Wana, Miranshah, Mingora, Sargodha, and Ladha. As a result of these operations, the Pakistan Army was able to clear markets and schools and also capture large numbers of weapons and ammunition from the insurgents active in those areas.

The second major step after clearing these areas was to relocate the locals and reconstruct the affected areas. The Pakistan Army opened 13 schools and cadet colleges, including Army Public School Guli Bagh, Cadet College Mamad Gat, Cadet College Swat, Cadet Ramazak Education Complex Ghijo, FC Public School Wana, Girls Hostel Kharthe training centres in Wana and Booni Khar, and Awaran for women. Pakistan Army operated medical camps for health and opened Khar and two other hospitals in South Waziristan. Furthermore, the Pakistan army established road networks and football and cricket stadiums in North Waziristan. All these projects were carried out to restore locals' trust in the military and instil hope for a brighter future. Another vital campaign the Pakistan Army executed was the de-radicalisation of the people. Pakistan Army, along with a local organisation known as Saboon and Rastoon, established rehabilitation centres for the youth and people who were brainwashed and psychologically exploited in those areas and madrasas. These efforts also included facilitation and help for the families of the targeted individuals.

Lastly, it is essential to highlight the significant role of Inter-Services Public Relations in shaping public perception and winning the hearts and minds of the people. ISPR released drama series and songs that framed and presented the efforts of the Pakistan Army."*Faseel-e-Jaan Se Agey*" A series produced by ISPR engagingly portrayed actual life operations. ISPR also released patriotic songs such as "*Kabhi Parcham main liptay hain,*" "*Hum Subka Pakistan,*" and "*Bara Dushman Bana Phirta hai*" to foster a sense of patriotism in the nation. In addition, many documentaries were released to showcase the Pakistan Army's developments. All these strategies played a crucial role in winning the people's hearts and keeping them informed about the military's efforts.

Outcome of WHAM: Public Response and Tactical Level Successes

The Pakistan Army's efforts yielded positive results at the tactical level and in public response. When the Pakistan Army relocated the internally displaced persons back to their areas, there was a remarkable change in their behaviour towards the Pakistan Army. The trust had grown to the point that they began inviting Army officials to local Jirgas to include the Army's perspective on security dynamics. In addition, locals began bringing their issues to the command in the area. Furthermore, people began sending their children to the education system. Now, they did not fear that their children would get recruited by terror groups, which was not evident anymore due to madrasa reforms. The Pakistan Army also played friendly matches with these people on the grounds. All these actions won hearts and minds, and people showed their trust and love for the Pakistan Army.

At the tactical level, when the Army was deployed in these areas to combat terrorism, the locals fully supported the Pakistan Army. They provided food and other essentials to the Pakistan Army and stood with the Army in conflict situations. The locals used to follow the convoys of the Army to give them messages to fight the

terrorists: we will protect the posts here. These acts were significant changes, as the Pakhtunwali culture's courage and bravery now focused on the peace-making process rather than on submission to extremism.

Another example is the attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar that shook the whole nation. By this heinous act, the Taliban not only made the nation strong against them, but also, regardless of the ethnic identities or values, the entire country stood with the Pakistan Army when the government announced Operation Zarb-e-Azab. This is one of the most successful operations because public support for the aim of "Aik Hai Qaum Aik Manzil" made it possible. Media productions through ISPR also assisted the forces in conveying messages to people to unify them against terrorism. These productions also helped the Pakistan Army inspire youth and increase recruitment. The youth was enthusiastic about joining the Pakistan Army to fight evil instead of being part of it. In conclusion, WHAM activities have produced the desired results. They have truly helped win hearts and minds among the local population, fostered a sense of patriotism, and increased their support for their country and the armed forces.

Recommendations

The Government of Pakistan has recently announced Operation Azam-e-Ishtekam; it is the first operation that the Pakistan Army is going to conduct on its territory after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. The authors of this paper believe that regular audits of the strategy are needed to ensure its alignment with the current situation. The approach should focus on developing mutual trust between the public and the Pakistan army during peacetime. A robust mechanism that accurately reflects the public's sentiment is necessary to achieve this. Based on this feedback, the authorities should actively deploy tools to win hearts and minds. The reason is that hostile state agencies and anti-statements will always be on the lookout to create a law-and-order situation to create resentment and to exploit the feelings of people through propaganda and misinformation campaigns.

Moreover, the government's crucial role in addressing the needs of people at all levels of conflict must be periodically reviewed. This emphasis on the government's role will instil confidence in the audience about its commitment. The government must take the lead in ensuring a harmonious balance and checks on the needs of the people, even after the success of the operations. Likewise, at the tactical level, to curtail terrorism and its impact on the people of affected areas, there is a need to establish units within those areas that recruit officers from those areas and serve and protect only that area from terrorism.

Conclusion:

The strategy of WHAM that the Pakistan Army practiced during the War on Terror proved efficacious to a great extent. It greatly helped dampen the terrorists' influence among the locals, which was crucial to winning the war against the enemy within. The analysis of the given methodology has supported the facilitation of the WHAM strategy in counterterrorism in areas characterised by comprehensive cultural and religious values and beliefs. Due to the first military orchestration by the Pakistan Army, programs such as Al-Mizan, Zalzala, and Tri-star were decisive in vacating the areas that terrorists dominated. However, reconstruction and rehabilitation became the norm in the WHAM approach. Thus, the Army provided daily amenities, built schools, medical centres, and other facilities to lay the foundation for sustainable development in the tribal areas. De-radicalisation campaigns and the opening of rehabilitation centres in cooperation with elements of civil society, such as Saboon, mitigated the presented degree of social psychological effects of terrorism. These, along with the overarching strategic communication campaigns launched by ISPR, significantly changed the overall perception and made the Nation stand against terrorism. Mastery at the tactical level yields diverse benefits, including enhanced local cooperation and active support for military operations, which ensure the effectiveness of the WHAM strategy. This has

effectively transformed public sentiment, especially after the APS Peshawar tragedy that brought together the whole nation and forces against terrorism. Moreover, the study emphasises the ongoing assessment and adjustment of the WHAM strategy in response to changing circumstances. The recommendations derived here signify a more sustainable and coherent policy approach to preserving order and stabilising the area than current practice, as they advocate routine auditing of the preceding strategy and greater government political engagement in its execution.

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