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# SECURITIZATION AND COUNTER-SECURITIZATION OF MILITANCY IN PAKISTAN AFTER 9/11

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## Abstract

The article attempts to explore the securitization of militancy of General Pervez Musharraf government (1999-2008) after the US War on Terror in Pakistan. This article addresses the fundamental question whether Musharraf government succeeded to securitize militancy and whether the audience (public) accepted militancy as a threat or not? We argue that the audience did not accept the threat as such and the issue was counter-securitized. We analyse the speeches of different leaders of the political and religious parties where they through speech acts counter-securitized the issue of militancy. The study contributes to the theoretical discussion on securitisation and counter-securitization using the model in Pakistan. The study contributes to the empirical literature by analysing militancy in Pakistan after 9/11 in the light of securitization framework.

**Keywords:** Securitization, Counter-Securitization, Pakistan, Militancy, Post-9/11

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## Introduction

This article investigates securitization of militancy in Pakistan in the aftermath of 9/11. Pakistan supported different militant groups in the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989) to advance its strategic interests in Afghanistan. However, after the terrorist attacks on the US Twin Towers and the subsequent initiation of the war against terror, the US invaded Afghanistan. Pakistan under the military regime of Pervez Musharraf was pressurised to support the US and NATO forces against the terrorists in Afghanistan. Musharraf's government needed external support to legitimise his regime and decided to become an ally of the US and launched military operations against the militants. In order to get the support of the people, Musharraf declared militancy as an existential threat to the country's security. However, his securitization attempt was not accepted by the audience. Consequently, despite military operations, militancy grew both in extent and intensity. Militancy in Pakistan has been discussed extensively, however, the role of the audience in the counter-securitization process has been overlooked in the case of Pakistan. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by investigating the militancy problem through the lenses of securitization.

Securitization is widely considered one of the most effective theoretical frameworks for examining security issues that go beyond traditional military aspects, with the nation-state holding a central role within the international system. It has emerged as the benchmark for examining emerging security challenges. However, despite its expanding scope, critics contend that the framework exhibits a Western bias deeply rooted in Western historical and political thought, thus having a Eurocentric perspective and a Westphalian viewpoint in comprehending security matters. The underlying problem here is that the Westphalian concept of the state fails to adequately account for the diverse socio-political stages of development in various non-Western societies. Wilkinson (2007) argues that the securitization theoretical framework may not be suitable for empirical studies conducted beyond Western contexts. Kaunert & Ezeokafor (2022) suggest that the securitization framework was initially formulated and utilized, whether knowingly or unknowingly, primarily within the established democracies of Europe. Consequently, the growing body of scholars, including Huysmans (1998; 2000); Balzacq (2008); Karyotis & Patrikios (2010) and Leonard (2010), employed this theory within a distinctively European context.

However, an increasing amount of literature has applied securitization framework in a non-Western context. For instance, Vuori (2008) uses the theory to study security politics in a non-democratic and non-Western context, i.e. Chinese Political System. His study focuses on how the issue of Falungong was securitized in China (Vuori, 2011). Bijl & Borgh (2022) focus on the securitization of Muslims in Myanmar. Kam & Clarke (2021) provide an overview of China's integration of modern, technological-driven securitization of ethnic Uyghurs in Xinyang province. Neo (2022) critically evaluates the political discourses in the US which securitized President Trump's presidency as a threat to US national security.

Similarly, Stritzel & Chang (2015) have used securitization theory to understand counter-securitization in Afghanistan. They explain how the US securitization move was counter-securitized by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Likewise, Beall & Clark (2021) explain how the securitization process proved counter-productive in the Uyghur (China) region. They highlight the importance of various audiences both domestic and international in the securitization processes. Fridolfssona & Elander (2021) use the framework to analyse the Swedish government's securitization of refugees in 2015. They explain how the civil society and the Church of Sweden counter-securitized the issue explaining the financial, organizational and cosmopolitan benefits of helping people in need. Lim (2018) highlights the securitization of 'fake news' by the Barisan Nasional (BN) in Malaysia during the 2018 general election. He argues that the securitization move was counter-securitized by the opposition party, Pakatan Harapan (PH) along with civil society groups claiming that the real threat to national security

is the BN's actions, not the 'fake news'. Similarly, Watson's study (2009) on the Danish cartoon crisis examines the resistance to securitization initiatives, however, they do not use the term counter securitization in their study. There is however, hardly, any study that has used/adopted a securitization framework to analyse the role of militants, religious parties and political parties in the counter-securitization of militancy in Pakistan.

The study adopts qualitative methodology to analyse the responses and reactions of political and religious audiences. Qualitative archival sources are used as a source of data collection. Theoretical literature on securitization is collected from books, journal articles and open online sources.

This article is structured into five sections. Section one provides the theoretical framework of the article - securitization theory. The subsequent section explains the unsuccessful securitization move of the Pervez Musharraf government after 9/11. Section three discusses how the securitization process excluded the audience as well as the importance of the speech act in the securitization process. Section four focuses on the role of political and religious parties in the counter-securitization of militancy. The final section is the conclusion.

### **Securitization Theory**

The Copenhagen School of Security Studies defines security as a process rooted in the social construction of threats. This process involves securitizing actors, often political elites, who declare specific issues as urgent and as threats to the very existence of the referent object. Once this declaration gains acceptance with the audience, it provides legitimacy for the adoption of extraordinary measures aimed at mitigating the perceived threat (Šulović, 2010). Watson (2012) demonstrates that 'an issue is securitized only if and when the audience accepts it as such, and securitization is not decided by the securitizer, but by the audience.' An issue, according to Buzan and others, is securitized by securitizing actors when a referent object has an existential threat and the actors seek extraordinary means to neutralise it (Buzan et al., 1998). In this view, securitization is an extreme form of politicization (Buzan et al., 1998). The securitization of an issue can thus provide some tangible benefits, including more efficient handling of complex problems, a mobilizing of popular support for policies in specific areas by calling them security-relevant, the allocation of more resources and so forth. These achievements might not be obtained if the same problems were regarded only as political matters (Emmers, 2013). A discourse that takes the form of presenting something as an existential threat to a referent object does not by itself create securitization - this is a securitizing move, but the issue is securitized only if and when the audience accepts it as such (Buzan et al., 1998). The process can be abused to legitimate and empower the military and other security agencies in civilian areas where their powers are usually restricted (Emmers, 2013).

But it is important to mention here that the critical point in the securitization process can be its failure. Ruzicka explains the different reasons due to which securitization fails. First, a securitizing actor might not know how to speak security in a specific context while presenting a securitization move. Secondly, the actors might not have sufficient authority over a specific issue vis-à-vis the audience. Thirdly, the threatening object presented as an existential threat may not be amenable to securitization. Fourthly, the relevant audience may not accept the securitization move (Ruzicka, 2019). Similarly, Stritzel & Chang's study (2015) suggest that the process of securitization in its implementation stage can be 'confronted with significant forces of resistance that can challenge securitization through counter-securitizations.' This can make the securitization process more complex and prolong between the two competing actors which can delay, stop or reverse the process (Stritzel & Chang, 2015). They argue that the war in Afghanistan shows a securitization versus counter-securitization process in which the US and NATO forces did not achieve successful securitization after 9/11 because the speakers could not incorporate the Afghan people as a key strategic audience (Stritzel & Chang, 2015).

Consequently, this allowed the Taliban to create a successful counter-securitization campaign against the foreign forces and the Afghan government where they presented themselves as authorised speaker of the Afghan people (Stritzel & Chang, 2015). Securitization can fail if it is limited to a rhetorical level and does not resonate with the audience and is not supported by institutional arrangements (Hintjens, 2019). Securitization moves need moral and formal institutional support to be considered to have succeeded (Balzacq, 2011).

This article aims to adapt the framework in a way that suits a non-Western context better. It stretches the conceptualisation of securitization into South Asian statehood, characterised by a blurred line between the leader and the state. The existing literature has discussed the cases where actors successfully securitized a particular issue in a specific context and securitization happened. The literature has also discussed counter-securitization cases in different countries. However, hardly any study has discussed the securitization and counter-securitization process in Pakistan which have profoundly affected the way securitization has been studied.

The key argument of this article is that despite the government's efforts to securitize the militancy, the securitization moves failed which helped the militants to counter-securitize the issue. The securitizing moves are driven by two key principles: firstly, whether the depiction of the threat as an existential one is either accepted or rejected, and secondly, whether the proposed solution to address the threat is accepted or rejected (Salter, 2011). Unlike de-securitization which 'entails a reversal of a previous successful securitization' (Salter, 2011). Failed securitization move is when the 'moves' fail to gain 'wider legitimacy among popular, expert and media audiences' (Hintjens, 2019).

In addition to the theoretical explanations advanced by scholars (Ruzicka, 2019; Stritzel & Chang, 2015; Hintjens, 2019), this study enhances our understanding by demonstrating that the securitization move will fail if it emerges from the securitizing actor insecurity dilemma. Serving the purpose of regime security and using securitization for regime legitimacy contributes to the failure of the securitization move. The empirical contribution of the article in contrast to the existing literature (Murphy & Malik, 2009) is that it explains that the key factor responsible for the unsuccessful securitization move of the Musharraf government was that it did not include the Pakistani people as an audience. His main audience was the Western leaders and he presented the Taliban as an existential threat to them. An issue is presented as an existential threat by saying that: 'If we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here or will not be free to deal with it in our own way)' (Buzan et al., 1998). The Taliban, on the other hand, established themselves as authorised speakers in the tribal areas, especially in Waziristan. The Taliban counter-securitization moves to stop the Musharraf government's securitization move were reinforced by the different political and religious leaders. They presented the US and NATO forces and their ally Musharraf government as an existential threat. It is important here to understand that in fighting militancy, the speech act of the securitizing actors should be stronger, clearer and accepted by the audience. If the speech act of the securitizing actors emanates from the actor's insecurity dilemma and is aimed at consolidating their own regime, the alternative speech act can prevail.

### **Securitization of Militancy in Pakistan**

**Securitization Move of Pervez Musharraf:** As an immediate neighbour of Afghanistan and a former supporter of the Mujahideen, Pakistan had to choose a side after 9/11. On the morning of September 12, the US deputy secretary of state, Richard Armitage, in a 'hard-hitting conversation' told the ISI chief General Mahmood (who was on an official visit to the US) that Pakistan should decide that: "You are either 100 per cent with us or 100 per cent against us - there is no gray area" (Abbas, 2015). On September 13, the US ambassador to Pakistan, Wendy Chamberlain brought Musharraf a set of seven demands.

1) Stop Al-Qaeda operatives coming from Afghanistan to Pakistan, intercept arms shipments through Pakistan, and end ALL logistical support for Osama bin Laden.

- 2) Provide the United States with blanket overflight and landing rights to conduct all necessary military and intelligence operations.
- 3) Provide territorial access to the United States and allied military intelligence as needed, and other personnel to conduct all necessary operations against the perpetrators of terrorism and those that harbour them, including the use of Pakistan's naval ports, air bases, and strategic location on borders.
- 4) Provide the United States immediately with intelligence, immigration information and database and internal security information, to help prevent and respond to terrorist acts perpetrated against the United States, its friends, or its allies.
- 5) Continue to publicly condemn the terrorist acts of September 11 and any other terrorist acts against the United States or its friends and allies, and curb all domestic expression of support for terrorism against the United States, its friends, or its allies.
- 6) Cut off all shipments of fuel to the Taliban and any other items and recruits, including volunteers en route to Afghanistan, who can be used in a military offensive capacity or to abet a terrorist threat.
- 7) Should the evidence strongly implicate Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and should Afghanistan and the Taliban continue to harbour him and his network, Pakistan will break diplomatic relations with the Taliban government, end support for the Taliban, and assist the United States in the aforementioned ways to destroy Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda network (Musharraf, 2006).

On September 14, Musharraf called a meeting of Corps Commanders and other senior staff officers at General Headquarters (GHQ) to convince them that Pakistan should join the US war on terror. He maintained that if Pakistan did not support the US, 'direct military action by a coalition of the United States, India, and Israel against Pakistan was a real possibility' (Abbas, 2015). Additionally, he believed that becoming a partner of the US would help Pakistan to (a) safeguard the cause of Kashmir, (b) secure Pakistan's strategic interests, and (c) help the economic infrastructure (Musharraf, 2006). However, to get US support, Pakistan had to end its support for the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (Haqqani, 2005). According to Musharraf, without accepting the US demands two and three, he agreed to curb terrorism in all its forms and manifestations (Musharraf, 2006).

Similar to Central Asian local elites, as suggested by Fumagalli (2010) in his book where they exaggerated the significance and impact of the threat 'for regime security purposes and, in Moscow's case, for justifying closer cooperation and enhancing Russia's strategic re-assertion in the region', the Musharraf government also overstated the domestic threat to the US and presented himself indispensable to counter the militant threat (Khan, 2011). Pakistan's former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, in his account, writes that Pervez Musharraf exactly like Bush and Blair used 'fear' as a weapon to galvanise public support (Khan, 2011). According to Akbar Ahmed, Musharraf 'cleverly convinced Washington that if he were removed, the dreaded Muslim fanatics with long beards, wearing shalwar-kameez and brandishing Kalashnikovs, would take over Pakistan's nuclear assets; in effect, Al-Qaeda would have access to nuclear bombs' (Ahmed, 2013). Musharraf described the situation in Pakistan in a similar way to what Brian Job called an 'insecurity dilemma' which regards that internal threats undermine the capacity of the state and only external support can help the regime to fight them (Job cited in Fumagalli, 2010). Khan (2011) further notes that: Musharraf modelled himself on two other military men - Iran's Reza Shah and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. They too believed that by imposing the outward manifestations of westernisation they could catapult their countries forward by decades. For Musharraf westernisation was modernisation, but he used Westernisation selectively. The West's success lay in genuine democracy, strong institutions, education, an independent judiciary, free media and free speech, whereas Musharraf was doing

the opposite. Making himself indispensable and agreeing to the US demands, he made Pakistan a frontline state in the war against terror.

Musharraf as an Unauthorised Speaker: The key challenge for the Musharraf government was to successfully securitize the issue of militancy internally because after joining the war on terror, he was perceived as a traitor not only to Pakistan but to Islam and the Muslim Umma (Ahmed, 2013). Most importantly, the people of tribal areas considered the US war on terror as a foreign invasion and gave shelter to those who managed to escape to the tribal region in accordance with their tradition of *Melmastia* (hospitality). *Melmastia* is one of the codes of Pashtun life where it is the responsibility of the host to provide the best to the guest and defend his life at the cost of his own. Additionally, many local Pakistani Taliban leaders had participated in the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s and had relations with the Afghan Taliban. However, for Musharraf, it looked natural, as he maintained in his book: Twenty-one years earlier it was natural for us to join the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan because we did not want the Soviet Union to consolidate its position and turn its attention toward our warm waters. In 2001 it was just as natural for us to join the war against terror because Pakistan has been a victim of sectarian and external terrorism for years, and certainly had no desire to be “Talibanised” (Musharraf, 2006). Musharraf in his speech act attempted to securitize the issue of extremism in Pakistan: The day of reckoning has come. Do we want Pakistan to become a theocratic state? Do we believe that religious education alone is enough for governance or do we want Pakistan to emerge as a progressive and dynamic Islamic welfare state? ... Look at what this extremist minority is doing. They are indulging in fratricidal killings. ... Mosques are being misused for propagating and inciting hatred against each other's sect and beliefs... The extremist minority must realize that Pakistan is not responsible for waging armed Jihad in the world (Abbas, 2015).

Securitization is an approach that states that ‘an issue is transformed into a security issue (that is securitised) after a securitising actor presents it as an existential threat and this ‘securitising move’ is accepted by the ‘audience’ (Sahar & Kaunert, 2021). As stated earlier, tribesmen were told for a long time that fighting foreign forces, especially in Afghanistan was their religious duty. Now a decade later they (tribesmen) were being told that extremism has become an existential threat. The government needed successful securitization of the issue while convincing the audience that extremism is not only a threat to the US but to Pakistan as well. However, instead of gaining the audience's acceptability first, the Musharraf government ordered the deployment of the Pakistan army into Waziristan to crush and pacify the tribes: a decision which according to Akbar Ahmed, Lord Curzon (the British viceroy in India at the time) was reluctant to take one hundred years ago (Ahmed, 2013). After having the support of the US, Musharraf according to former Director-General ISI Asad Durrani, ‘had convinced himself that he was infallible ... He was, therefore, unlikely to be impressed by the ways of tribesmen or the romance of their history’ (Durrani, 2018). Therefore, he ordered the deployment of security forces to flush out the foreign militants from the tribal areas. Consequently, hundreds of suspects including Pakistani citizens were arrested without due process of law and were handed over to the US in return for dollars (Durrani, 2018). Supporting Durrani’s account, Imran Khan notes further that ‘after being strong-armed by the Americans, Pakistan’s political elite shamefully accepted dollars in exchange for turning on its own people’ (Khan, 2011). Musharraf himself wrote: We have captured 689 [militants] and handed over 369 to the United States. We have earned bounties totalling millions of dollars. Those who habitually accuse us of ‘not doing enough’ in the war on terror should simply ask the CIA how much prize money it has paid to the government of Pakistan (Musharraf, 2006).

When the tribesmen resisted the handover of foreign militants, the army conducted a military operation in March 2004 in South Waziristan. After the heavy loss to the security forces, the army in its response ‘bulldozed about eighty houses, overrunning decades-old irrigation

channels; levelled wells and tube wells; arrested more than two hundred locals; and according to one of them, killed scores of people as well' (Gul, 2008). The government signed a peace agreement with the militants but according to Aurakzai who remained governor of KP from 2006-2008, all the agreements were broken under American pressure (Khan, 2011). Lt. General Aurakzai reported that they told the Americans that the military operations were causing collateral damage and contributed to militancy, but one of the Americans replied, 'We are paying you to fight, not to draw up peace agreements' (Khan, 2011). The army deployment without successful securitization internally created strong resentment amongst the local inhabitants. This resentment and criticism reinforced the argument that the government was conducting military operations under US pressure. The tribal leaders of seven agencies gathered in 2004 in Bara (Khyber agency) and they warned the government not to play with the lives of innocent people. The grand jirga<sup>1</sup> was attended by notables from all the tribal agencies including Senator Hamid Ullah from the Khyber Agency and Senator Abdur Rashid of the Orakzai agency. The speakers of the jirga said that the ongoing military operations in the tribal areas had created a sense of insecurity amongst the tribal people who are now compelled to think about other options. The jirga declared that 'We are sure that there are no Al-Qaeda and Taliban members in the tribal areas, however, if the government thinks so, even then we cannot allow them to transgress the cultural norms of the tribal areas' (The Frontier Post, 2004a). The Senators in the jirga, Hamid Ullah and Abdur Rashid said that 'if the military believes foreign nationals are hiding in tribal areas even then we will recommend that direct action against them should be avoided' (The Frontier Post, 2004a). Musharraf lacked sufficient authority over the issue of militancy vis-à-vis the audience. He overlooked the importance of a religious narrative which helped the militants to counter-securitize the issue.

### **Securitization without Incorporating the Strategic Audience**

**Lack of Clear Conceptualization of Militancy:** As stated above, the government policy in the aftermath of 9/11 focused more on ensuring the autocratic regime security than on securitization of extremism and developing a political and religious consensus. Pakistan's post-9/11 policy to deal with militancy suffered immensely due to the lack of a clear conceptualization of militancy. The mindset and confusion of the government and society made it difficult to evolve a joint strategy against the militants (Siddiqi, 2011). Scholar Madiha Afzal observes that 'the Pakistani state has never engaged in a clear conversation with its citizens about the terrorist groups targeting the country - explaining who they were, where they came from, what they say they want, and why they are wrong; (Afzal, 2018). Another scholar notes that the confusing strategy of the government enabled the elites and the common people to tolerate Taliban activities (Feyyaz, 2015). The government's lack of investment in people to prevent extremism allowed the counter-securitization campaign of insurgents to grow unchallenged (Abbas, 2016). According to Feyyaz, there was no professional approach to counter the insurgents' discourse which provided a space for the militants to propagate their ideology (Feyyaz, 2015). Sajjad notes that: Pakistan faces an enemy today which has cleverly borrowed from the ideological discourse of the country to promote its radical extremist worldview. The Pakistanis seem confused in a war that is fought in the name of Islam on both sides. Many seem inclined to support extremist groups who claim to be more Islamic than the state (Sajjad, 2015).

Renowned Pakistani expert Ayesha Siddiqi maintains that one of the most significant flaws in the strategies of the US and Pakistan was the excessive use of force to fight an ideological war. Ideological wars can only be defeated with a more powerful ideology (Siddiqi, 2011). Feyyaz (2015) identifies the inherent flaws in the political system and the society which hindered the acceptance of the securitization move: 1) Pakistan's commitment to tackle terrorism was not

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<sup>1</sup> Jirga is a council of elders. In the tribal areas, jirga decides cases according to the code of Pakhtunwali.

viewed as very serious and was seen as rather rhetorical by a certain segment of society; 2) there was a lack of the specialised skills required to craft an alternate discourse which is culturally assimilated. As far as the specialised skills are concerned, the militants were manipulating the simple message which could be countered with the support of mainstream Ulema, but unfortunately, under the authoritarian regime, the government preferred to strengthen the regime security instead of securitizing extremism. Security analyst Rana (2009) identified four major weaknesses of the insurgency in Pakistan and argued that the counterinsurgents (government) should have exploited these. Firstly, the Taliban insurgency in Pakistan had an anti-democratic agenda and they failed to align themselves with political parties. Secondly, the sectarian differences among the Taliban made them unable to obtain the support of all sects. Thirdly, there were ethnic divisions among the different groups. Lastly, their extreme interpretation of Shariah and the system they wanted to impose lacked the full support of the major religious scholars and parties. However, despite the Taliban's anti-democratic and anti-religious agenda, the government failed to aggregate public opinion against them.

Until the Army Public School (APS) incident in 2014, the audience seemed polarised even over the condemnation of militant attacks. Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) chief Munawar Hassan in one of his controversial statements in 2013 said that the chief of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Hakeem Ullah Mehsud, who was killed in a drone attack was a Shaheed (martyr). Hassan adhered to his view even after the army officially demanded his apology. Similarly, the head of the other major religious party, Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam - Fazal (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazal ur Rehman stated that even a dog killed in US attacks is a martyr (The Tribune, 2013). Some religious scholars such as Tahir Ashrafi and Tahir ul Qadri issued fatwas against the militancy. For instance, Tahir Ashrafi, who headed the Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC), issued a fatwa in 2016 which proscribed the use of religious terms 'jihad fi Sabilillah' (jihad for the sake of God) and 'Qital fi Sabilillah' (murder for the sake of God) and any other activity related to extremism and terrorism in the name of religion (The Nation, 2016). Similarly, Tahir ul Qadri in a 600-page fatwa criticised Islamic extremists who use religion for violence and declared in his religious ruling that suicide bombers are destined to hell (CNN, 2010). However, the dubious and tarnished reputation of both speakers could not effectively help the securitization move of the government (Iqbal et al., 2019). The lack of any consensus among political and religious leaders, polarization and confusion, left few voices brave enough to openly condemn the suicide attacks let alone religious extremism. Those religious scholars who raised their voices were either killed or forced to leave the country. In 2009, a renowned religious scholar and principal of Jamia Naeemia, Sarfaraz Ahmad Naeemi, was killed in Lahore in a suicide bomb attack for his anti-suicide views. Similarly, in 2010, Muhammad Farooq, another moderate scholar and vice-chancellor of Swat University, was killed for his views against the activities of the Taliban (Hoti, 2010). Another great scholar, Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, had to leave the country after his life was threatened. As stated above, government policy to deal with the insurgents remained confused until the APS attack, which kept the society polarised, thus providing them with an opportunity to gain the sympathy and support of the people. The government and opposition parties only came up with a clear discourse and evolved a National Action Plan in 2014, deciding to take indiscriminate action against all the groups. The inability of the government to securitize the issue and make a distinction between jihad and armed struggle against the state significantly affected the military operations against the insurgents.

#### **The Role of Political and Religious Parties in the Counter-Securitization Process**

Political and religious parties in Pakistan revolve around individuals and pursue vested interests rather than public interest. This made the securitization of extremism more difficult. Furthermore, the Musharraf government coercive policy led almost all the major political parties to criticise and counter-securitize the government securitization move for what they



called unnecessary operations to please the US. Muttahida Majlis Amal (MMA)<sup>2</sup>, an alliance of six major religious parties which had formed a government in the adjacent KP province, played a more active role in criticising the government's move and organising a protest. In an interview with the BBC, the Secretary-General of MMA, Maulana Fazal ur Rehman, said that 'the United States has expanded its operations all over the world and I think, the demands of justice during these operations have not been fulfilled. The feeling of mistrust and hatred against the United States is on the rise' (The Frontier Post, 2002).

The MMA organised a countrywide protest in 2003 against a possible US attack on Iraq, and FBI operations in Pakistan. Maulana Fazal ur Rehman observed that the 'US is the biggest terrorist in the world, and demanded the Islamic world to unite against the US and save the world peace' (The Frontier Post, 2003a). Lawmakers from the provincial KP assembly in 2003 expressed their concerns over the military operation in Bannu district and adjoining areas and termed their interference in the affairs of the province and a violation of Pashtun traditions which can cause an anti-government backlash (Yousafzai, 2003). Addressing a student convention, the leader of Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), Mehmood Khan Achakzai, said that there are no terrorists and foreign nationals in the tribal areas and that the government should stop the military operation (Razarwal, 2003). Flanked by leaders of PPP and PML-N, the MMA chief Qazi Hussain Ahmad warned the government that 'if the operation in the tribal areas is not stopped forthwith, we will launch a movement in FATA after Ramadan... The military crackdown is detrimental to our national cohesion' (The Frontier Post, 2003b). The Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD)<sup>3</sup> supported the MMA stance and demanded that the matter of military operations should be brought before parliament for discussion. Awami National Party (ANP) central president Asfandiyar Wali Khan in his address to the students in Bolan medical college said that the rulers of the country would pay the price of innocent lives of Pashtuns from South Waziristan (The Frontier Post, 2004b). The chief of ARD, Amin Fahim, alleged that the government was conducting a military operation to safeguard US interests (The Frontier Post, 2004g). Addressing a huge rally in Spinkai Raghzai, Maulana Mairajud Din, a Member of the National Assembly (MNA) from North Waziristan stated that the government had killed many tribesmen in the name of Al-Qaeda (The Frontier Post, 2004a). In his interview with the BBC, the local Taliban commander Nek Muhammad said 'It is wrong that Al-Qaeda members are hiding here. Those foreigners who are living here are not terrorists - rather they are Mujahideen who took part in the Afghan jihad' (The Frontier Post, 2004e). He further maintained that these foreigners had lived there for 15 years, were married to local women and had built their own houses, and now under US pressure, the government was calling them Al-Qaeda suspects (The Frontier Post, 2004e). The then opposition leader in the National Assembly, Maulana Fazal ur Rehman declared that the government was massacring people in the tribal areas under US pressure (The Frontier Post, 2004f).

Lamenting the government for military action, Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf chief Imran Khan demanded the setting up of a parliamentary committee to probe the massacre of tribesmen at the hand of their own army. If there was any criminal activity in which the tribesmen were involved, the government should collect evidence and prosecute them according to the prevalent laws (The Frontier Post, 2004c). Imran Khan maintained that there might be a few militants in the area, but it is the responsibility of the government to identify and alienate those people with the support of the tribesmen. He further said that keeping in view the lessons learnt from history, using force will only cause the situation in the area to deteriorate. Senior Khyber

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<sup>2</sup> Muttahida Majlis Amal was an alliance of six religious parties formed after 9/11 to resist the Musharraf government and establish Shariah government.

<sup>3</sup> The Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) was formed in 2000 by Pakistan Peoples Party and Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) to restore democracy after Musharraf declared an emergency in 1999.

Pakhtunkhwa minister and Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) leader Siraj ul Haq, while expressing his concerns regarding the operation, noted that the government had turned Waziristan into a laboratory for US weapons (The Frontier Post, 2005). In a protest against the US airstrike in the tribal areas, the MNA from Bajaur Haroon Rashid said that the Musharraf government first betrayed the Taliban regime by standing with the US and ‘now he has betrayed his own people by allowing US forces to attack<sup>4</sup> Bajaur Agency’ (The Frontier Post, 2006). The JI leader from the Khyber Agency, Muhammad Hassan Shinwari, argued that ‘the ongoing bloody military operation is in progress just to please our American Masters (The Frontier Post, 2006).

Parliament, which should have played a key role in the securitization of militancy and the military operations in the tribal areas, was never consulted by the President (Perlez, 2008). Instead, parliament was discredited and the National Assembly remained the most ineffective in the country’s history during the Musharraf period (Rashid, 2008). The political parties also failed to develop a coordinated strategy because they were divided into factions and lacked a dominant ideology to unite the society fragmented along class, ethnic, and cultural lines (Hussain & Malik, 2014). The lack of democratic culture in political parties and their focus on individual interests made people believe that ‘America’s war is against them and not the militants in the tribal areas’ (Feyyaz, 2015). The above evidence suggests that the Musharraf government securitization move was not accepted by the domestic audience which made the soldiers reluctant to fight their ‘co-religious and, in many cases, their fellow Pashtuns’ (Gregory & Revill, 2008). The Pakistani soldiers were also seen as proxies for the US in the tribal areas (Khan, 2011). The US presence in Afghanistan, the military offensive of the Pakistan army and the active opposition of political parties strengthened the counter-securitization discourse that the government was pursuing an unjust war which had to be resisted.

### **The Counter-Securitization Campaign of the Militants**

As noted above, political and religious parties condemned and criticised the government securitization moves after 9/11, which helped the militants to create a successful counter-securitization campaign against the latter. The Pakistani Taliban used the counter-securitization move portraying the government as a puppet of the US, invading the tribes, and challenging the traditional and religious roots of the country. Furthermore, the roller coaster relations between the US and Pakistan and the post-9/11 engagements followed by Pakistan’s military operations in the tribal areas, together with the US drone attacks, provided strong support to this counter-securitization move against the state (Sajjad, 2015). The collateral damage resulting from drone strikes significantly reinforced the counter-securitization move of the Taliban (Khan & Kaunert, 2023). They maintained that ‘There is a war going on against Islam, and the West is a major enemy. Muslim rulers are agents of the West’ (Khan, 2013). It was, therefore, the duty of every tribesman to protect his religious and tribal pride. This move was further reinforced by the complex global, regional and domestic security concerns which transformed the traditional conservative Pakistani society into a radical and hostile one (Sajjad, 2015). Muhammad Feyyaz outlines the main points of the Taliban counter-securitization move.

- 1) The Pakistani state is un-Islamic, murderous, and is the enemy. The Pakistani government is an apostate and a US protégé that usurps the people’s power.
- 2) The Taliban are the knights of Tawhid and jihad.
- 3) Democracy is kufr (un-Islamic) and needs to be replaced by sharia dispensation.
- 4) Being heretics and sinners, Shias are kafir.
- 5) The war on terror is based on a false perception of tribal Muslims by the Pakistan army and will be avenged.

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<sup>4</sup> On January 13, 2006, the CIA fired missiles into the village of Damadola in Bajaur Agency. The attack killed at least 18 people including six women and six children. For more details see ‘Burning the Barn to Roast the Pig? Proportionality Concerns in the War on Terror and the Damadola Incident by Gul & Royal (2006).

6) The media is dajjal - a false messiah - and engaged in misleading the masses (Feyyaz, 2015). The insurgents projected the government as a puppet of the US pursuing an anti-religious agenda against the tribesmen, while on the other hand, they presented themselves as the saviours of religion and authorized speakers. To achieve their objectives the local insurgents employed a strategy helping them to win the sympathy of the people. Rana explains the four-point strategy of the Taliban under Bait Ullah Mehsud. Firstly, his fighters took action against criminals and began to collect taxes. In 2006, the Taliban distributed pamphlets in North Waziristan inviting people to alert the Taliban 'if any incident of robbery, dacoity [banditry] or any other criminal act took place in the area' (Zaman, 2018). Secondly, they killed the influential tribal elders who could potentially challenge their authority. Thirdly, they established a parallel justice system to resolve disputes and dispense prompt justice. The Taliban in Pakistan 'represented rough and ready, Robin Hood-like forms of social justice, though that imagery is not peculiar to them in contemporary Pakistan' (Rana, 2009). Finally, they appointed trusted men to the offices which contributed to the welfare of the local population, which helped them to win the hearts and minds of the people. In Bajaur Agency, Tehrik-i-Taliban established a court in July 2008 and enacted decisions on 1,000 cases out of 1,400 by August 2008 (Rana, 2009). The insurgents' increasing role and their quick dispensation of justice attracted support from the people. These measures in areas of high unemployment and lack of development paved the way for Taliban support, where they offered the tribal youth money, power and respect (Qazi, 2011).

These militant groups began to challenge the authority of the state while using religious discourse. As argued in this study, the militancy could be effectively countered with successful securitization of the issue and integration of the voices of authorized speakers. It is important to note here that Islam was brought to the South Asian sub-continent through the work of great Sufi saints who conquered the hearts and minds of the people with a message of love. After the British occupation of the sub-continent, Muslims demanded an independent country where they could practise the principles of Islam such as equality, equity, justice and freedom for all citizens, irrespective of caste and creed. This message was evident in the first speech of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah when he declared that you may belong to any religion, caste and creed, the state has nothing to do with this.

During the Soviet-Afghan war, both the US and Pakistan became heavily embroiled in promoting militant groups against the Soviets. Madrassas were opened, and curricula were designed to promote jihad. After becoming an ally of the US in the war on terror, Pakistan initiated a crackdown against the groups previously engaged in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Although these groups were banned, and their leaders were arrested, their discourse was left unchallenged. The renowned scholar Istiaq Ahmed suggests that Pakistan can learn from Singapore while countering militancy. According to him 'Singapore remained consistent and constant in the realisation of the vision of a state with equal rights for all citizens, in Pakistan the governments that followed deviated from Jinnah's vision' (Ahmed, 2011). This study combines the key points of the counternarrative of the renowned Pakistani scholar Ghamidi with the joint declaration of 1,800 religious scholars arguing that extremism could be effectively challenged by incorporating the below points part of the securitization move (Researchers of Islamic Research Institute, 2018)). The key points of Javed Ahmad Ghamidi's counternarrative are discussed below.

1) Negating the rallying cry of the militants to make an Islamic state, Javed Ahmad Ghamidi maintains that it is baseless to think that the state has any religion; rather the message of Islam is primarily addressed to an individual and it wants to rule the hearts and minds of the people. This negates the whole idea of extremist groups who consider it their religious duty to fight for the establishment of an Islamic state. Rebelling against the state is a grave crime according to

the Muslim faith. Thus, for example, the Prophet Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) was quoted as saying that ‘a person who does so dies with the death of jahiliyyah (ignorance).

2) No person or group has any right to declare a person or group a non-Muslim if they claim themselves as Muslims. If they deviate or depart from any principle of Islam, it is up to the religious scholars to point out their mistakes and invite them to a debate and warn the people regarding those mistakes. It is upon Allah Almighty to decide on the day of judgment who is right and who is wrong. The militant groups effectively established the narrative that the rulers of Pakistan were pursuing a non-Muslim agenda and it was therefore incumbent upon every Muslim to fight against them. Religion does not give this authority to any Muslim to judge the faith of others.

3) Similarly, jihad is one of the most important directives of Islam and asks its followers to wage jihad against injustice and oppression if they have strength. However, no group or individual can wage jihad on their own, and it is the responsibility of the ruler. The Prophet (PBUH) was reported to have said that ‘A Muslim ruler is a shield; war can only be waged under him.’

4) Jihad is only fought for the cause of Allah; therefore, it is significantly important to regard the moral and ethical principles defined in the Quran and Sunnah. The Quran clearly states, ‘Fight in God’s cause against those who fight you but do not overstep the limits: God does not love those who overstep the limits’ (The Qur’an Translated by Haleem, 2005).

5) Islam clearly defines the principles of government. ‘The affairs of the Muslims are run based on their mutual consultation’ (The Qur’an, 42:38). This means that the Islamic government will be formed based on the principle that everyone has equal rights. All the decisions will be made through mutual consultation. The principle defined in The Quran is precisely democratic.

Despite the explicit message of the Quran, the Musharraf regime failed to produce an effective narrative to support his securitization move. He himself was not an authorised speaker on matters of religion, therefore, his speech act was not accepted by the audience. The religious scholars who questioned the narrative of the militants were either killed or made to flee the country. This created a vacuum and helped the militants to effectively counter-securitize Musharraf’s securitization moves.

## Conclusion

This study analysed the unsuccessful securitization of militancy by the Musharraf government in Pakistan and the subsequent counter-securitization campaign by the Taliban, religious and political parties. Securitization has arguably become the most successful theoretical framework to analyse security beyond the military confines. The theory is being used to understand security issues in non-Western settings, as discussed in the introduction. However, hardly any study exists that discusses the securitization of militancy in Pakistan by the Musharraf government in the aftermath of 9/11. After Pakistan became an ally of the US against the war on terror, the securitizing actors (Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan’s case) convinced the external actor such as the US and the West that the Taliban are an existential threat to the security of the country but he failed internally to convince the domestic audience through his securitization moves. This helped the militants to present themselves as authorised speakers and counter-securitize the militancy and presented Pervez Musharraf as an existential threat to the country and the religion of Islam. The key implication of the above empirical finding is that militancy in different parts of the world should be analysed through the framework of securitization theory. In addition to the theoretical explanations advanced by scholars (Ruzicka, 2019; Stritzel & Chang, 2015; Hintjens, 2019), this study enhances our understanding by demonstrating that the securitization move will fail if it emerges from the securitizing actor’s insecurity dilemma. Serving the purpose of regime security and using securitization for regime legitimacy will contribute to the failure of the securitization moves as seen in the case of Pakistan after 9/11.

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