

## Resurgence of Terrorism in Pakistan: Evaluating Counterterrorism Strategies through a Human Security Lens

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### Abstract

*The return of the Afghan Taliban to power in August 2021 was widely perceived by many observers as a strategic success for Pakistan due to its facilitative role in the Doha peace process and its long-standing engagement with the Taliban leadership. Contrary to these expectations, however, Pakistan witnessed a significant resurgence of terrorism, particularly through the renewed activities of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The re-emergence of TTP has resulted in escalating violence across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Balochistan, posing serious challenges to Pakistan's national security and internal stability. This study examines the factors contributing to the resurgence of TTP following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and critically analyzes Pakistan's response to the renewed terrorist threat. The paper explores the peace negotiations between the Government of Pakistan and TTP, assessing the motivations behind the talks and identifying the political, ideological, and strategic factors that led to their eventual failure. It further investigates the social, economic, and security consequences of terrorism on both the Pakistani state and local communities, highlighting the broader implications for human security. The study evaluates the effectiveness of Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy by examining both kinetic measures, including military operations and intelligence-based actions, and non-kinetic initiatives such as radicalization programs, community engagement, and policy reforms. Using a qualitative research methodology and relying on secondary sources, including government reports, academic literature, policy papers, and media analyses, the study employs the Human Security Framework as its analytical lens. The findings suggest that while Pakistan has achieved certain tactical successes in countering terrorism, significant structural and policy shortcomings continue to undermine long-term peace and security. The paper argues that an overreliance on state-centric security approaches has limited the effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts and emphasizes the need for comprehensive policies that prioritize human security, governance reforms, socio-economic development, and sustainable peacebuilding.*

**Keywords:** Terrorism, TTP, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, Resurgence.

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## Introduction

Terrorism is inherent in violence. Terror derives from the Latin word *terrere*, which means “to cause fear” or “to quake.” When combined with the French suffix *isme* (which means “to practice”), it takes on the meaning of “practicing the act of trembling” or “causing fear.” The problematic regional policies that Pakistan has been pursuing, especially in Afghanistan since the 1980s, have contributed to terrorism in the country. However, those errors no longer serve as the exclusive causes of extremism (Basit, 2021). The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the U.S. withdrawal did not initiate or terminate terrorism in Pakistan. In contrast, Pakistan's terrorist threat has become stronger as a result of the U.S.-led war on terror, and it is now more ingrained and widespread in society than it has ever been (Basit, 2021). The international political system, in which nations have been essential since the end of the Cold War, is facing a new threat in the form of global terrorism. The Bush administration compared the 9/11 terrorist attacks to World War II as a result of the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. President Bush used the analogy to declare war on terrorism worldwide, comparing the terrorist assaults to the Pearl Harbor tragedy of the twenty-first century.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emerged after the Pakistani military aligned with the US in her Global War on Terror (GWOT). Since its formal establishment in 2007, the TTP unleashed a massive campaign of terrorist violence targeting security forces, its infrastructure, and civilians. The most horrific attack occurred when the TTP attacked APS killing 150 people, including women and mostly children. In the wake of Karachi Airport attack by the TTP, which claimed the lives of many innocent civilian population, the Pakistani military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014 and Operation Radd-ul Fssad in 2017, which resulted in a significant reduction in terrorist attacks in the country. Pakistan's counter-terrorism operations against the TTP prompted the terrorist group to move into Afghanistan territories and continue their operations in Pakistan. However, after the Taliban victory in Afghanistan, The TTP accelerated its terrorist campaign, and the group militants' presence in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) was also reported. Therefore, the group's resurgence and its presence in the former tribal areas pose a new threat to Pakistan's counter-terrorism successes achieved over the previous years. The TTP and its splintered groups have been emboldened by the Taliban's success against the US forces in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Afghan Taliban have been reluctant to take solid actions against the group since the Afghan Taliban recognized TTP's allegiances and support during its struggle against the occupation of US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military alliance. In recent months the TTP attacks against the Pakistani Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and civilians have become ruthless.

Aside from those who join sectarian organizations, most would-be radicals in Pakistan who join extremist groups are not driven by ideology. Among those who join the lower echelons of militant groups, the majority appear to be driven by a variety of

grievances, such as unemployment and poverty, political disenfranchisement, and ethnic marginalization. Not all militants, particularly those operating at a lower level, are driven only by ideological motivations in Pakistan's varied and intricate threat landscape. Perhaps the reasons for extremist radicalization in Pakistan are as varied and complex as the militant landscape itself. It is obviously ineffective to blame Islam for solving the issue. Rather, the fundamental complaints need to be addressed. Such a strategy would hinder the recruiting of militants and promote public support for counterterrorism efforts. (Basit, 2021).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study uses a Human Security framework to critically examine the resurgence of terrorism in Pakistan. Human Security, as outlined in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, shifts the security paradigm from a state-centric to an individual-centric approach. Pakistan has historically employed a militarized and state-centric approach to counterterrorism, which has resulted in short-term gains but at the expense of long-term strategic gains. This paper examines how Pakistan neglected common people's concerns and the possibility of recurring violence by failing to address terrorism-related grievances such as poverty, unemployment, a lack of education, and inequities.

### **Pakistan's Talks with TTP after Taliban Took over in Afghanistan**

During 2004-2009, Pakistan entered into nine different peace agreements with jihadist groups but failed to maintain peace in those agreements for maintaining peace. In 2021, the Pakistani government once again tried to negotiate with the TTP to maintain stability and peace in the country. The talks were most likely mediated by the Afghan Taliban. The Pakistani then Prime Minister, Imran Khan, in an interview with a Turkish news outlet, stated that "the talks are for the TTP's disarmament, reintegration and their commitment to respect and live by Pakistani law. Imran Khan added that if the talks succeeded the government will give amnesty to TTP and they will become normal citizens. But TTP rejected the peace talk by responding that amnesty is provided who committed crimes. TTP vowed to proceed their violent struggle. TTP's spokesperson, Muhammad Khurasan stated that we can negotiate with the Pakistan government if it pledges to implement Sharia law in Pakistan. The reason behind the failure of negotiation could be that the peace talks offered by PTI's government was not supported by that military and the PTI urged this matter in the parliament unilaterally, which was opposed by the then opposition. The opposition member Irfan Siddique demanded government call parliament session and brief the parliament about these talks, as it is a critical internal security issue (Desk, 2021).

According to the National Counter Terrorism Authority NACTA, Pakistan has been facing the issue of terrorism since 2001. From 2001-2022, a period of more than 20 years, Pakistan has lost more than 80,000 lives and faced a huge economic loss of about 35 trillion rupees. This scourge of terrorism has led to increase in violence,

extremism and intolerance in society, resulting in increased number of attacks and atrocities than in 2021. The surge in terrorism in Pakistan during Democratic Movement (PDM)'s government frustrated the top leadership of Pakistan. The statements of Pakistan's army chief, defense minister, and interior minister about TTP's safe havens in Afghan depict the trust deficit between Pakistan and Afghan Taliban. The current spike in terrorism not only threatens Pakistan's security and stability but also undermines the region's security. Islamic State Khorasan Pakistan (ISKP) has also boosted its regional operations in competition with the TTP to win over recruits and funding. The current spike in terrorism and militancy proved to be a wake-up call for all the stakeholders in Pakistan; however, it seems that the leadership has no clear strategy to cope with the emerging terrorist threat. The previous government engaged in peace negotiations with the TTP with the help of the Afghan Taliban, which led to a brief ceasefire between the parties. It may be argued that it was a strategic mistake on Pakistan's end because it "emboldened" the TTP to regroup and return to Pakistani territories.

The resurgence of terrorists' groups including TTP, Baluchistan liberation army (BLA) and ISIS-K (Islamic State Khorasan Province) conducted attacks in the Baluchistan, Punjab and Sindh provinces. TTP emerged as a major perpetrator in Pakistan since the Taliban took over in Afghanistan (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023). Since Afghan took over, Pakistan faced a significant increase in terrorist attacks. According to south Asia terrorism portal (SATP), number of terrorist attack in Pakistan in 2021 was 267 which reached to 365 in 2022 (SATP, 2023). TTP posed a significant threat to police, military and security services in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Terrorist groups used different tactics in attacking various targets, including suicide bombings, targeted assassinations, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIEDs).

According to Global Terrorism Index 2024, Pakistan has been ranked at number four globally among the countries most effected by terrorism and extremism. But the Global Terrorism Report of 2025 is more devastating than 2024, ranking Pakistan at number two in the list of countries most effected by terrorism (Ahmed, 2025). According to a report about GTI of 2025 published in Dawn, the terrorist attacks in Pakistan increased by 45% in 2024 as compare to 2023, losing 1,081 innocent lives, and the number of terrorist attacks increased from 517 in 2023 to 1,099 in 2024 (Dawn, 2025). This is the first time that the number of deaths exceeded from 1,000 since the inception of index. With a 90% increase in attributed deaths, the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) became the terrorist organization with the quickest rate of growth. For a second year, the TTP continues to be Pakistan's most deadly terrorist group, 52 percent of Pakistan's deaths in 2024 were caused by it. In an effort to weaken state authority and interfere with military operations, the TTP has consistently targeted security forces and infrastructure. The Pakistani government has responded by launching counterterrorism programs like Operation Azm-i-

Istehkam. The biggest terror assault in Pakistan in 2024 was carried out by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), when a suicide bomber at the Quetta train station in Balochistan murdered at least 25 soldiers and civilians. The persistent instability in Pakistan is still being used by Baloch militant organizations like the BLA and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF). The number of attacks by these groups has grown dramatically, rising from 116 in 2023 to 504 in 2024. Deaths more than quadrupled to 388 from 88 the year before. Furthermore, the rise in the activities of Baloch terrorist groups has been a major factor in Pakistan's increased terrorism in 2024. Because Balochistan's natural resources are being exploited without fair development or remuneration for the local population, the BLA has publicly protested the government's resource extraction practices. Additionally, the group has accused foreign investments of marginalizing the Baloch people through Chinese projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). There has been a rise in terrorism-related fatalities for five years running, and this is the biggest annual increase Pakistan has seen in the past ten years. The 12th annual Global Terrorism Index (GTI), released in March 2025, also notes the significant increase in the terrorism related incidents in Pakistan after the Taliban took over Afghanistan. It is revealed in the report that TTP emerges as fastest growing terrorist organization globally responsible for 52% of deaths and the number of countries suffered from terrorism also increased from 58 to 66.

The Fitna Al Khawarij (TTP to be called Fitna Al Khawarij by Pakistani government), who remained less active in Afghanistan from 2017-2021, conducted a series of attacks in KPK and Baluchistan (Khan&Khan, 2024). The Taliban took over in Afghanistan, by international analysts was considered a success for Pakistan, as Pakistan played an instrumental role in bringing US and Taliban on a table for dialogue. But unfortunately, this didn't happen and the bilateral relations between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan government became harsh resulting in the resurgence of terrorism in Pakistan. This unwelcoming relations between the Kabul administration and Pakistan administration, resulted in support for Fitna Al Khawarij in conducting attacks in Pakistan from Afghan Taliban Initia-soldiers of Afghan Taliban Government. Another study revealed that Taliban from Afghan government supported terrorist activities in Pakistan by removing fences many times at Pak-Afghan border (Khan&Khan, 2024). The Kabul's Taliban administration refuses the claim that it providing harboring to the TTP. But according to the Asfandiyar Mir, a senior scholar at the US institute of Peace, Taliban's administration is providing "a permissive safe haven in Afghanistan" which made it "lethal and resilient" (The Ney York Times, 2024). The support by Afghan Taliban to TTP is due to the reason that the Afghan Taliban and TTP have the ideological alignment including the goal of establishing a state governed by their interpretation of Islamic Sharia Law and the Afghans Taliban allowing them to regroup, unite, and launch attacks from Afghan soil (Banerjee, 2025). Tragic consequences have resulted from the ISI's long-term transfer of knowledge, equipment, and supplies to the Afghan Taliban as well as the alliance between

Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban (Nadery, 2023).

### **Impact of Terrorism on Pakistan**

In Pakistan, terrorism has had a profoundly negative social and psychological impact, primarily on the younger generation (Malik, 2023). For years, this menace has afflicted Pakistan, killing numerous people and seriously crippling others. One of the biggest issues is terrorism, not only from a national security perspective but also because it has enduring social and psychological repercussions that traditional counterterrorism strategies cannot address. In addition to violating human rights, terrorism has a detrimental effect on the economy. Pakistan sustained significant economic losses and a high death toll between 2001 and 2022. Terrorism has a catastrophic human cost, but its economic impact is far worse (MOFA, n.d.). The long-term economic damages resulting from terrorism's secondary or indirect effects are not included in this. There are certain consequences for Pakistan's national security due to the link between Afghanistan's facilitation of cross-border terrorist activity. Afghanistan is currently readjusting its stance to satisfy the opposing goals of the major world powers, while simultaneously addressing erratic relations with Pakistan. In order to establish the limits of stability and peace in Afghanistan, reconciliation is essential. Pakistan's internal security is directly impacted by the situation in Afghanistan. For Pakistan's overall interests, maintaining peace and stability in Afghanistan is essential (Ullah, 2024).

### **Pakistan Counter Terrorism Strategies**

Pakistan's counterterrorism policy has been on a slippery slope despite its intense kinetic operations against TTP, and its splintered group's terrorism has been on the rise in Pakistan. Pakistan's counterterrorism strategies, through the military tactics, involve the launch of Operations *Al-Mizan*, *Rah-e-Raast*, *Rah-e-Nijat*, *Zarb-e-Azb*, and *Rad-ul-Fasaad*. These military operations against terrorists marked a short-term success for Pakistan, but this short-term success cannot be translated into a strategic win against terrorism and extremism. Also, each new initiative to counter terrorism is considered a political move. Other measures were also taken to deal with the terrorist violence. For example, the government formed its first-ever counter-violent extremism policy in the form of the National Action (NAP) plan that aimed at addressing the extremist problem of the country, which indirectly supported terrorism in Pakistan, to come up with new dimensions to curb terrorism and militancy. Though Pakistan had launched many operations against terrorism and extremism after the TTP rise in Pakistan, it was the very first time when Pakistan made a policy against terrorism through the national consensus after the 2014 attack on Army Public School in Peshawar on December 2014, resulting in the loss of 140 innocent lives. Some of the main points highlighted in the National action plan of 2014 include the trials in military courts to the implementation of death sentences against those convicted in the terrorism activities. It was also decided to take strict decisions against the

literature, newspapers, and magazines promoting extremism or terrorism (NACTA, 2014). In 2021, Pakistan revised its National Action Plan; however, it still lacks to address significant areas of policy-making and its implementation. The Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, after he returned back to Pakistan from his visit to China in June 2024, talked about the new counterterrorism strategy. Prime Minister Mr. Shahbaz urges that the new counter terrorism strategies will be more intensified. Instead of initiating fresh military offensives, focus on increasing existing intelligence-based operations. Some experts correctly link the timing of the decision to political circumstances. But there are also compelling reasons to think that China was a driving force behind the new plan, and that it may even be involved in the strategy after it is put into action. Chinese backing stems from the fact that Chinese nationals or interests have been targeted by the TTP, the Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). In western Pakistan, close to the Afghan border, there are numerous Chinese investment projects that are particularly susceptible to terrorism (Kugelman, 2025).

### **National Prevention of Violent Extremism**

Pakistan launched its new counter terrorism strategy, National Prevention of Violent Extremism (NPVE) in the early days of 2025, focused on 5-R approach, Revisit, Reach Out, Reduce, Reinforce, and Reintegrate. NACTA's director of research and development Dr. Dayyab Gillani, in his interview to Al Jazeera pointed that "Although Pakistan had launched similar anti extremism framework in the past but this approach is different. According to him, the primary change is that the new method addresses terrorism and extremism by using a "whole of society" approach" (Hussain, 2025). Gillani maintained that although the earlier strategies were "reactive" and mostly concentrated on kinetic measures, the NPVE method is different from others since it is preventive and community-based. Al Jazeera reported.

### **5-R Approach**

1. **"Revisit,"** the first policy measure, aims to engage adolescents and influential people like educators and religious leaders while also changing the curriculum.
2. By opposing extremist narratives on social media, **"Reach Out"** seeks to advance a national narrative through the media.
3. Through studies on women's roles in armed revolt and peace initiatives, **"Reduce"** focuses on women and youth.
4. Through innovation in science, the arts, and culture, **"Reinforce"** aims to advance tolerance and peace.
5. For former combatants and communities impacted by violence, the last policy action, **"Reintegrate,"** entails de-radicalization, rehabilitation, and reconciliation initiatives.

## **Analysis of the Counter Terrorism Strategies**

The core issue underlying the resurgence of terrorism in Pakistan is the failure to adopt and implement a long-term proactive strategy against terrorism and extremism (*Pakistan's Counterterrorism Strategy*, 2025). One of the reasons behind the failure to counter terrorism is that the military lacks public support and trust of the people in the affected areas. The public wants military and militants to be expelled from the region, and the socioeconomic conditions of the public are disturbed. Moreover, military, bureaucratic, and judicial arenas seemed to lack impact assessment, especially regarding measures taken to counter extremism. Janjua in his study quoted Mehsud of Khorasan Diary that "Public support is the key in curbing the militancy in both the provinces. There is a need to revamp and better equip the country's terrorism capacity with technology, as militants have advanced weapons. Use of drones could also be effective to eliminate the terrorists"(Janjua, 2024).

The renewed threat of terrorism in Pakistan is a result of both regional developments and local policy failures. The backing for TTP from Afghan territory hindered Pakistan's counterterrorism policies. The Taliban's backing also eroded previous counter-terrorism victories made through military operations such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fassaad. The ideological connection of the TTP with the Taliban in Kabul reinvigorated extremism and terrorism; many experts saw the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan as a strategic gain for Pakistan, but their assessment was overturned. Pakistan has traditionally utilized a military-centric approach to counterterrorism, which has failed to address the root causes of terrorism, such as a lack of education, socioeconomic and sociopolitical deprivation, ethnic animosity, and injustice. For example, in Balochistan and KPK, particularly in the FATA, people have limited access to education, work, and health care facilities, all of which are utilized by terrorist organizations to recruit members, leading to anti-state sentiments. The peace discussions with TTP in 2021, mediated by the Afghan Taliban, lack consistency and transparency. Furthermore, peace discussions were held without consent from Pakistan's civil and military stakeholders, resulting in the talks failing and the truce ending. TTP reformed into around 75 split units and began violent activities in KPK. The detrimental relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Durand Line issue, and illegal border crossings all posed substantial threats to Pakistan's internal security. In Balochistan, the emergence of ethno-nationalist resurgent's such as the BLA and BLF, particularly their attacks on Chinese individuals and the CPEC, demonstrated Pakistan's multipolar terrorist landscape.

## **Conclusion and the Way Forward**

There have been many official documents and strategies to confront the challenge of terrorism and militancy. The National Security Policy 2022 (NSP) notes that "the most acute form of efforts to undermine stability and national harmony of a society is terrorism." Similarly, the revised 14-point NAP 2021 also emphasizes

addressing the menace of terrorism and militancy. Nonetheless, Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy had some success in the past, but it lived a short life. The recent spike in terrorism and militancy requires a new approach of kinetic and non-kinetic strategies. The Pakistani government must engage the Afghan Taliban to form a strategy to engage the TTP to negotiate a peace plan to achieve lasting stability. They must develop a mechanism for intelligence sharing so that intelligence-based targeted operations against the miscreants can be executed. Pakistan must also provide socio-economic and socio-political development for the war-torn districts. One of the main factors for TTP's presence in the tribal areas had been winning back the support of some of the tribesmen due to their grievances against the Pakistani government's approval of GWOT.

Terrorism is not only Pakistan's problem but a global phenomenon. Whenever there has been instability in Pakistan or Afghanistan, it has a spillover effect in the region. Pakistan needs to engage all regional stakeholders, including China, Iran, and India, to develop an information-sharing network to counter the illicit activities in the border region. Pakistan must also engage the local masses to ensure an inclusive counter-terrorism policy that is cohesive with the local realities and concerns. Due to the recent abrupt initiation of counter-terrorism operations in KPK, people in Swat and North Waziristan protested in great numbers on the streets against the operation. It highlights a gap between existing policy frameworks and indigenous local realities, emphasizing the need for meaningful engagement of local stakeholders before implementing any robust interventions in the province.

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