THE US INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN: TRANSFORMING PAKISTAN'S SECURITY LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

The US invasion of Afghanistan significantly affected Pakistan's security dynamics by exacerbating cross-border terrorism, straining civil-military relations, and leading to an influx of refugees, which intensified internal security challenges and destabilized the region. This study employs a historical research design and qualitative methodology, utilizing secondary sources to analyze the impacts of the US invasion of Afghanistan on Pakistan's security landscape. Before 9/11, Pakistan experienced sectarian conflicts but was relatively free from widespread terrorism. In the post-9/11 period, the US invasion of Afghanistan and Pakistan's alliance with the US led to increased terrorist activities, severe human and economic losses, and heightened instability across the country. The paper is an effort to highlight Pakistan's security landscape in the milieu of the US invasion of Afghanistan.
Keywords: 9/11, Pakistan, the US invasion, security, Afghanistan, terrorism.

INTRODUCTION

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, orchestrated by al-Qaeda, catalyzed a seismic shift in global geopolitics, precipitating the US invasion of Afghanistan. The primary objective was to dismantle al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban regime that harbored the terrorist organization. However, this military intervention had far-reaching consequences not only for Afghanistan but also for its neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan. This introduction aims to elucidate the transformation of Pakistan's security landscape as a consequence of the US invasion of Afghanistan, delving into the pre-9/11 environment, the immediate aftermath of the invasion, the resultant threats, and the socio-political and economic ramifications for Pakistan. Before the events of 9/11, Pakistan's experience with extremism and terrorism, though significant, was somewhat localized and contained. The country had grappled with internal sectarian violence and the spillover effects of its involvement in the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. The jihad had led to the proliferation of militant groups and a culture of

jihadism, which was initially state-sponsored and aligned with Pakistan's strategic interests in Afghanistan and Kashmir. However, these dynamics took a new and more dangerous turn post-9/11.

The US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 aimed to eradicate the al-Qaeda network and oust the Taliban regime. Pakistan, under significant international pressure, officially aligned itself with the US-led coalition, becoming a front-line state in the War on Terror. This alignment marked a pivotal shift in Pakistan's internal and external security policies. The immediate repercussions included a dramatic increase in militant activities within Pakistan. The Taliban, along with other extremist groups, found refuge in Pakistan's tribal areas, leading to the radicalization of a significant portion of the population. The War on Terror also exposed and exacerbated the vulnerabilities along the porous Pak-Afghan border. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) became a haven for various militant groups, including the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and later, factions of the Pakistani

Taliban (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan or TTP). The tribal regions, with their rugged terrain and autonomous tribal governance, provided an ideal environment for these groups to regroup and launch attacks both in Afghanistan and within Pakistan. The Pakistani state's efforts to exert control over these areas often resulted in violent clashes, further destabilizing the region.

One of the most contentious aspects of the US-Pakistan relationship during this period was the use of drone strikes. The US conducted numerous drone operations targeting militant leaders in Pakistan's tribal areas. While these strikes were ostensibly aimed at decapitating the leadership of terrorist organizations, they often resulted in significant civilian casualties and widespread destruction. The collateral damage fueled anti-American sentiments and provided militant groups with a powerful propaganda tool to recruit and radicalize local populations. The drone strikes also strained US-Pakistan relations, as Pakistan publicly condemned the violations of its sovereignty while privately acquiescing to or even cooperating with the US in these operations. The security situation in Pakistan deteriorated markedly as a result of the US invasion of Afghanistan. The country faced an unprecedented wave of terrorism, including suicide bombings, targeted assassinations, and large-scale attacks on military and civilian targets. The Pakistani military launched several operations in the tribal areas to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure, but these efforts were met with fierce resistance. The militant response often included retaliatory attacks in major urban centers, spreading fear and insecurity across the nation. The constant state of conflict had severe socio-economic implications, including displacement of populations, economic stagnation, and a significant drain on national resources.

The political landscape in Pakistan also underwent substantial changes due to the War on Terror. The government faced immense pressure from the US to act decisively against terrorist groups, while simultaneously managing the domestic backlash from various political and religious factions. This period saw the rise of religious political parties and an increase in extremist ideologies gaining mainstream acceptance. The socio-political fabric of the country was tested as the state struggled to balance international demands with internal stability. Moreover, the financial costs of combating terrorism and maintaining security were enormous. Pakistan received substantial military and economic aid from the US, but this was often tied to stringent conditions and expectations. The economic instability, coupled with the pervasive threat of terrorism, hampered Pakistan's development prospects and strained its public services. The US invasion of Afghanistan had a profound and multifaceted impact on Pakistan's security landscape. From a pre-9/11 environment of localized extremism, Pakistan was thrust into a complex and protracted conflict that reshaped its internal dynamics and external relations. The immediate threats posed by the War on Terror, the challenges of managing the Pak-Afghan border, the contentious drone strikes, and the socio-economic costs have all contributed to a deeply entrenched state of insecurity. This introduction sets the stage for a detailed exploration of these themes, examining how Pakistan navigated the tumultuous post-9/11 era and the enduring implications for its national security and stability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 has had far-reaching implications for Pakistan's security landscape, influencing its domestic politics, regional dynamics, and counterterrorism efforts. This literature review critically examines six key papers that provide insights into the transformation of Pakistan's security environment following the US intervention in Afghanistan, while also identifying gaps in the existing research.

Ahmed's historical analysis offers a comprehensive overview of Pakistan's security considerations in the context of the War on Terror. While the paper provides valuable insights into Pakistan's strategic alignment with the US-led coalition, it primarily focuses on historical developments and lacks a detailed examination of contemporary security challenges faced by Pakistan (Ahmed, 2008). While Ahmed provides a thorough historical analysis, there is a gap in understanding the contemporary security implications of the US invasion of Afghanistan on Pakistan, particularly in terms of evolving terrorist threats and regional power dynamics.

Fair's study examines the consequences of the Afghan War on Pakistan's tribal areas, highlighting the rise of militant groups and governance challenges in the region. However, the paper predominantly focuses on the tribal dynamics and does not delve deeply into the broader implications for Pakistan's national security strategy (Fair, 2007). While Fair's

research provides valuable insights into the impact on tribal areas, there is a gap in understanding how these dynamics have influenced Pakistan's overall security posture and its relationships with external actors.

Jaeger and Paserman's empirical study investigates the effects of US drone strikes on civilian casualties and anti-American sentiment in Pakistan. While the research sheds light on the consequences of drone operations, it primarily focuses on the micro-level impacts and does not provide a comprehensive analysis of broader security implications for Pakistan (Jaeger, & Paserman, 2014). While Jaeger and Paserman offer valuable insights into the localized impacts of drone strikes, there is a gap in understanding how these targeted killings have shaped Pakistan's overall security landscape and its strategic calculus in the War on Terror.

Khan's paper analyzes Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy following the US invasion of Afghanistan, emphasizing the challenges of distinguishing between allies and adversaries. While the study provides a detailed examination of Pakistan's domestic counterterrorism efforts, it overlooks the broader regional dynamics and external influences shaping Pakistan's security landscape (: Khan, 2011). While Khan's research highlights Pakistan's internal security challenges, there is a gap in understanding how external factors, such as the US invasion of Afghanistan, have influenced Pakistan's security paradigm and its relations with neighboring countries.

Lodhi's study examines the evolving dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in the post-9/11 era, focusing on historical grievances and strategic interests. While the paper provides valuable insights into bilateral relations, it lacks a detailed analysis of how the US invasion of Afghanistan has shaped Pakistan's security calculus and its approach towards Afghanistan (Lodhi, 2017). While Lodhi's research highlights the complexities of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, there is a gap in understanding how external interventions, such as the US invasion of Afghanistan, have influenced Pakistan's security priorities and regional policies.

Rizvi's article examines the impact of the US invasion of Afghanistan on Pakistan's security paradigm, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities for Pakistan. While the paper offers insights into Pakistan's strategic calculations, it primarily focuses on broad assessments and lacks a

nuanced analysis of specific security dynamics and policy responses (Rizvi, 2019). While Rizvi provides an overview of the impact of the US invasion, there is a gap in understanding the detailed mechanisms through which the invasion has influenced Pakistan's security landscape, including its counterterrorism strategies and regional engagements.

Overall, the existing literature offers valuable insights into the impact of the US invasion of Afghanistan on Pakistan's security landscape. However, there are notable gaps in understanding the contemporary security challenges faced by Pakistan and the specific ways in which external interventions have shaped its security policies and regional dynamics. Future research should aim to address these gaps to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Pakistan's evolving security environment in the post-9/11 era.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative research methodology and employs a historical research design and to analyze the impacts of the US invasion of Afghanistan on the security dynamics of Pakistan. The research relies on secondary sources for data collection, including academic journals, government reports, books, and credible news articles. These sources provide a comprehensive overview of the historical context and evolving security landscape. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth analysis of complex security issues, focusing on the nuances and interconnected factors influencing Pakistan's security dynamics. The study examines key themes such as the rise in cross-border terrorism, the strain on civil-military relations, and the socio-economic implications of the refugee influx. By analyzing historical data, the research identifies patterns and causal relationships that have shaped Pakistan's security environment. Secondary data is critically analyzed to understand the broader implications of the US invasion on regional stability and internal security within Pakistan. This methodology ensures a thorough and nuanced understanding of the multifaceted impacts, providing valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders interested in the region's security dynamics

EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM IN PAKISTAN BEFORE 9/11

Before the events of 9/11, Pakistan experienced sporadic instances of sectarian and religious conflicts, with extremism and terrorism largely confined to these localized conflicts. However, significant regional developments, including the Iranian revolution and the rise of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, along with the prevalence of Jihad culture, exerted a detrimental influence on Pakistani society. The 1980s marked a pivotal period with the introduction of Islamization policies under the Zia Ul Haq government, leading to the proliferation of Madrassas across the country. These Madrassas later served as training grounds for Afghan Mujahidin, fostering the cultivation of a jihadist culture within Pakistan. Consequently, extremist ideologies gained traction, garnering support from religious political factions within the nation. Notably, Pakistan's alignment with the United States during the Afghan-Soviet conflict in 1979 was motivated by the shared goal of countering communist expansionism. However, following the Soviet Union's collapse, the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan positioned Pakistan as a crucial intermediary for the Taliban's external interactions (Amir, 2010).

Post-9/11, Pakistan underwent a significant shift in its approach, distancing itself from the Taliban and assuming a frontline role in the global effort to combat terrorism, particularly in collaboration with the United States. This transition marked a pivotal moment in Pakistan's stance towards extremism and terrorism, recognizing them as pressing national security concerns. Consequently, Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) emerged as a breeding ground for extremism, serving as a launching pad for terrorist activities that permeated throughout the country. The contemporary terrorist landscape in Pakistan is characterized by sophisticated networks with access to advanced technologies and resources, facilitated by globalization and technological advancements (Saima et al., 2012). Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan conflict against terrorism has engendered a myriad of domestic challenges, with state policies playing a central role in exacerbating the proliferation of terrorism within its borders. The genesis of Pakistan's current predicament can be traced back to the late 1970s, with the seeds of extremism sown during this period and subsequently nurtured until the cataclysmic events of 9/11.

WAR ON TERROR AND SECUIRTY IN PAKISTAN

Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States embarked on a mission to combat terrorism, particularly targeting Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Acknowledging the strategic significance of Pakistan's cooperation in this endeavor, the US adopted a multifaceted approach to engage with Pakistan. The paradigm of "either be with us or against us" pressured Pakistan into aligning its efforts with the US-led war on terror. However, Pakistan's decision to join this coalition stemmed from a desire to safeguard its national interests (Rooh ul Amin, 2020). As a frontline ally in the global war on terror, Pakistan bore a significant brunt. Despite 9/11 being an assault on American soil, Pakistan experienced a surge in terrorist activities within its own borders, leading to a deterioration of law and order nationwide. Acts of terrorism, including bombings and suicide attacks, became pervasive across the country. Pakistan, historically serving as a refuge for various armed Islamist insurgencies, hastily committed to collaborating with the international community post-9/11. This shift in policy towards Afghanistan presented both opportunities and challenges for Pakistan, exacerbating bloodshed and political instability, particularly in regions such as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Baluchistan.

The confluence of poor governance and a reliance on military interventions further exacerbated political turmoil and the rise of extremism within Pakistan. Al Qaeda, along with its affiliates, continued to operate within the country, fostering a nexus between the Pakistani Taliban and transnational terrorist networks. This nexus, characterized by suicide attacks and bombings, posed a grave threat to Pakistan's security landscape. Moreover, Pakistan encountered a direct military incursion by foreign forces on September 3, 2008, marking an unprecedented challenge to its sovereignty and security (Saima et al., 2012). The repercussions of the global war on terror reverberated deeply within Pakistan, precipitating a surge in internal conflicts. The proliferation of Talibanization engendered a culture of terrorism, epitomized by various violent manifestations, including surprise attacks on security

forces, targeted assassinations of political and civil society figures, and the bombing of civilian infrastructure. Musharraf, in his memoir, underscored the profound impact of the 9/11 attacks on Pakistan, emphasizing the enduring legacy of this seismic event. The toll of the war on terror on Pakistan's populace has been staggering, with estimates indicating a loss of over 83,000 lives and an economic cost exceeding US $126 billion over the past two decades (Jamal, 2021; Rana, 2011).

PAK-AFGHAN BORDER AND SECURITY CONCERNS FOR PAKISTAN

The Durand Line, delineating the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, spans approximately 2,640 kilometers and was established through an agreement between Abdur Rahman Khan, the Afghan king, and Sir Mortimer Durand of the British Indian administration. Signed on November 12, 1893, in Kabul, Afghanistan, this agreement laid the groundwork for the present-day border (Schons, 2011). However, the enduring legacy of this boundary has led to significant challenges in the region, exacerbated by Kabul's non-recognition of the border's legitimacy. The rugged, mountainous terrain along the border further complicates control and security efforts, presenting formidable obstacles to effective governance (Karaca, 2011). The Pashtun community, residing predominantly on both sides of the border, historically disregarded the boundary's significance, fostering a culture of cross-border movement that hampers enforcement measures. Given the larger Pashtun population in Pakistan compared to Afghanistan, the border's porous nature is particularly pronounced, posing considerable difficulties in restricting illicit activities such as human trafficking, arms smuggling, and drug trafficking (Karaca, 2011).

Pakistan's inability to assert control over its borders not only exacerbates internal security concerns but also impacts regional dynamics, particularly in its relationship with India. External pressures, notably from the United States, have prompted calls for increased military presence along the Afghan border to counter terrorist threats, yet Pakistan's capacity to meet such demands remains limited. Concerns over exacerbating tensions within the Pashtun community and the potential for internal instability further complicate efforts to bolster border control (Karaca & Özkurt, 2015). The porous border has facilitated the influx of militants from Afghanistan into Pakistan, particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provinces. For inhabitants of these regions, the War on Terror has assumed a deeply political dimension, with many viewing the Taliban as legitimate adversaries against perceived foreign occupation. Consequently, sentiments towards the United States range from hostility to outright enmity, with the conflict exacerbating socio-economic hardships and undermining community stability (Akbar, 2015).

The volatile border region has provided fertile ground for the emergence of militant groups such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), posing a direct threat to Pakistan's security and territorial integrity. Non-state actors have capitalized on the region's vulnerabilities, perpetrating acts of violence targeting civilians, military personnel, and political and religious figures. Economic deprivation and institutional shortcomings have further fueled militancy in areas like FATA, exacerbating poverty and social marginalization (Sultana, 2015; Hilali, 2010).

THE ISSUE OF DRONE ATTACKS IN PAKISTAN

The advent of drone warfare in Pakistan, initiated by the United States with its first reported attack on June 19, 2004, has engendered a clandestine conflict resulting in the loss of thousands of innocent lives. The program's inception in South Waziristan, where a strike targeting Taliban leader Nek Muhammad claimed the lives of numerous civilians, set the tone for a covert campaign characterized by official denials and secrecy (The Drone War in Pakistan, 2022). During President Obama's tenure, the utilization of drones in Pakistan saw a significant escalation, particularly with the implementation of signature strikes. These strikes, distinguished by their reliance on patterns of behavior rather than specific intelligence on individual targets, were intensified under Obama's presidency despite efforts to refine targeting criteria to minimize civilian casualties. However, Pakistan remained exempt from such regulations, with the justification that identified targets posed imminent threats to US interests.

The contentious issue of drone attacks in Pakistan has spurred divergent viewpoints within the country. Proponents argue that drones are indispensable in combating terrorism in the region, given the rugged terrain's challenges and the difficulty of conventional military operations. Conversely, critics contend that

drone strikes constitute extrajudicial killings, resulting in a disproportionately high civilian death toll compared to terrorists targeted. Despite the elimination of prominent Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leaders like Hakim Ullah Mehsud and Baitullah Mehsud in drone strikes, the collateral damage inflicted on civilians remains a contentious issue (Maan, 2014). The involuntary and indiscriminate nature of drone strikes in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has led to a significant number of civilian casualties, overshadowing the targeting of high-value terrorists. This collateral damage has contributed to mounting anti-US sentiment and threatens to exacerbate instability in the region. The statistical analysis of drone strikes and casualties underscores the human cost of this controversial tactic, with a substantial number of innocent lives lost alongside targeted militants (Sultan, 2015).

In summary, the issue of drone attacks in Pakistan remains a complex and divisive topic, marked by a delicate balance between national security imperatives and humanitarian concerns. Despite their purported efficacy in targeting terrorist elements, the disproportionate civilian casualties incurred have fueled opposition to their continued use, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach to counterterrorism strategies in the region.

THE PRICE OF PROTECTING PAKISTAN'S NATIONAL INTERESTS

Pakistan honestly cooperated in the war on terror, but only on the condition that its own national interests were not harmed. The war against terrorism in Afghanistan delivered terror, insecurity, and massive human casualties, with long-term consequences that would take decades to recover from. Pakistan paid a considerably higher price for fighting a war as a non-NATO member than all other NATO countries, such as costs of terrorism proliferation and costs in human and economic terms (Khawaja & Mahmood, 2020).

TERRORISM PROLIFERATION

The war on terror began in Afghanistan, with the primary goals of eliminating Al Qaida and overthrowing the Taliban regime in Kabul. However, the war soon spread across Pakistan, wreaking devastation in the country's population centers and complicating Pakistan's security and socioeconomic issues. Terrorism not only created psychological disorders among Pakistanis, but also it established ethno-religious fissures, dividing society in two ways: for the militants and against them. Pakistan has lost a large number of innocent people and military personnel throughout this long-running asymmetric war, which lasted from 2001. Pakistan lacked the capacity and skill, as well as the political will, to combat such a large-scale, war-hardened insurgent at initially (Rooh ul Amin et.al, 2020).

The appeasing strategies used in Operation Al Mizan and Operation Zalzala (2002-2008) did not achieve intended results. As a result, the number of terror incidents and casualties has continued to rise at an alarming rate. However, it was with Operation Rah-e Nijat in Sawat, Operation Rah-e Rast, and Operation Zarb-e Azb that the threat of violence and terror was eradicated, with no distinction made between good and bad Taliban, and all terrorist strongholds were destroyed. The Army Public School tragedy in Peshawar on December 16, 2014, gave the operation a truly national spirit, uniting the entire nation behind the National Action Plan and 2763 insurgents were killed as a result of the operation. After Rah-e-Nijat, the terrorist profile began to deteriorate progressively, with a rapid fall from 2010 onwards (Khattak, 2015).

EMERGING THREATS OF ISIS IN PAKISTAN

Since the Islamic State (IS) took control of northern Iraq and eastern Syria in 2014, it has been widely assumed that the IS will soon extend its tentacles into Pakistan. For decades, Pakistan has sown the seeds of sectarianism and religious extremism, and the IS would gain the benefits of productive soil. Despite the state crackdown, IS was willing to grow in Pakistan due to the widespread presence of Islamic extremism, and this is one of the reasons Pakistan is confronted with the IS threat today. It is unsurprising that, following the United States' exit from Afghanistan last year, it has resurfaced as a danger in Pakistan.

A recent attack by the group, carried out by an IS suicide bomber on March 4 in a Shiite Mosque in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is a case in point. At least 64 civilians were killed in the attack, with many more injured. Worryingly, it was Pakistan's bloodiest attack in last four years. In Sibi town Baluchistan, IS carried out another massive attack less than a week later from Peshawar attack. Six security personnel were killed, while 22 others were injured, including 19 law enforcement officers.

Unfortunately, this has exposed the Islamic State's rising threat to the country.

Islamic State terrorists are believed to have travelled from Afghanistan to Pakistan, according to security analysts. Because sectarianism and religious extremism have long been a part of life in Pakistan, the risk of IS-led militancy is quite high. Sectarianism has altered Pakistan's terrain for all the wrong reasons during the last three decades. The mounting threat posed by IS has heightened concerns among Shia Muslims and other religious minorities, who have long been victims of Sunni extremism. Thousands of Shias Muslims were killed in Pakistan prior to the arrival of the IS. However, militancy led by the Islamic State (IS) appears to be resurfacing in the country. Following the Afghan Taliban's onslaught on IS terrorists, the militants are alleged to have fled to Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban have mostly eliminated the IS danger in Afghanistan; nevertheless, this does not bode well for Pakistan, which may become the terrorist group's preferred base (Notezai, 2022).

MAJOR THERRORIST ATTACKS IN PAKISTAN

Following the tragic events of 9/11, Pakistan's governance faced significant challenges due to weak and ineffective policies, compounded by abrupt shifts in both internal and external strategies. This, in turn, facilitated the proliferation of terrorism within the country. Initially confined to the border districts of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), terrorist activities gradually expanded to encompass broader regions of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), eventually spreading across the entire nation. Pakistan has borne and continues to bear a heavy toll in the war against terror, resulting in the loss of countless innocent lives, widespread destruction of property, and significant setbacks in political, social, and economic spheres (Yusufi & Islam, 2018). The policy volte-face towards Afghanistan post-9/11 has presented Pakistan with both opportunities and challenges. While it has sparked violence and political instability in FATA, KP, and Baluchistan, it has also necessitated a reevaluation of Pakistan's role in regional dynamics. The toll exacted by terrorism is staggering, with over 35,000 Pakistanis, including 5,000 armed soldiers, losing their lives in the first decade of the war on terror. The year 2010 alone witnessed 2,113 militant and sectarian attacks, resulting in the deaths of 2,913 individuals and injuries to 5,824 others (Rana, 2011).

In the year 2021, Pakistan experienced a total of 207 terrorist attacks, including five suicide bombings. These attacks, perpetrated by various religiously motivated militants, nationalist insurgents, and violent sectarian factions, claimed the lives of 335 individuals and left 555 others injured ("Pakistan Security Report," 2021). The breakdown of these attacks by region illustrates the widespread nature of the threat, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan, and Punjab bearing the brunt of the violence. The cumulative toll of Pakistan's engagement in the war on terror is staggering, with over 83,000 lives lost and an economic cost of nearly US $126 billion over the past two decades (Jamal, 2021). This underscores the profound impact of terrorism on Pakistan's society, economy, and security landscape, necessitating a multifaceted approach to address the root causes and mitigate the ongoing threat.

TERROTIST ATTACKS IN KYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

Prior to the events of 9/11, suicide attacks were virtually unheard of in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and other regions of Pakistan. It was not until the onset of armed conflict in Waziristan in 2004 that suicide terrorism emerged as a significant threat. The Taliban, seeking to assert their control over these areas, employed suicide attacks as a means to solidify their authority and deter opposition from rival factions or governmental institutions. Initially, the Taliban's presence was minimal in adjacent districts such as Bannu, Kohat, Dera Ismael Khan, and Peshawar. However, over time, they sought to extend their influence into these urbanized regions, strategically located along the FATA border. The Taliban's adoption of suicide terrorism was driven by various objectives, including undermining government authority, destabilizing security forces, and exacting revenge for military operations conducted in FATA and Swat. Retaliatory attacks against military operations in these regions were not limited to the immediate vicinity; suicide assaults were carried out across Pakistan, particularly targeting security forces (Chari, 2011).

One of the most tragic incidents in Pakistan's history occurred on December 16, 2014, with the Peshawar school massacre. Seven heavily armed Taliban gunmen stormed an Army Public School, resulting in

the loss of 150 lives, including at least 134 students, and leaving over 100 individuals injured. This heinous act drew widespread condemnation both nationally and internationally. Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility for the massacre, citing it as retaliation for government attacks on their members. In response, Pakistan lifted a six-year moratorium on the death penalty and executed numerous accused Taliban members (Lewis, 2021).

TERRORIST ATTACKS IN PUNJAB
Before 2004, Punjab was primarily associated with sectarian violence, but the landscape of terrorism drastically transformed in the subsequent years. The year 2007 emerged as a particularly tumultuous period in Pakistan's history, marked by a significant escalation in terrorist incidents. Notably, the assassination of Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2007, during her election campaign at Liaqat Bagh in Rawalpindi, stands as a stark testament to this turbulent era. Bhutto's assassination, orchestrated through gunfire and a suicide bombing, unleashed a wave of societal unrest, manifesting in widespread violence, looting, and arson. Regarded as one of Pakistan's most egregious instances of street terrorism, the event cast a dark shadow over the nation's collective consciousness (Saima et al., 2012). Amidst the backdrop of the war on terror's first decade, Punjab witnessed a surge in terrorist activities, resulting in the loss of 315 lives, including 62 security officials, in 20 separate attacks. The city of Lahore, in particular, bore witness to the devastating impact of suicide assaults, exemplified by the tragic events at Moon Market. In 2008 alone, Punjab experienced 12 suicide attacks, with Lahore being a prominent target. The roots of these attacks often traced back to southern Punjab, serving as a breeding ground for militant organizations like Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba, which recruited and trained individuals for suicide missions (Noor-ul-Haq, 2011). The spotlight on Punjab's susceptibility to terrorism intensified following the audacious attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore on March 3, 2009. This brazen assault not only claimed the lives of six policemen but also inflicted injuries upon seven Sri Lankan players, prompting widespread condemnation and tarnishing Pakistan's international reputation. Consequently, the incident significantly deterred international teams from participating in cricket matches within Pakistan's borders. Furthermore, acts of terrorism continued to plague Punjab, exemplified by the tragic events at Parade Lane Mosque in Rawalpindi on December 4, 2010, where terrorist gunfire and suicide bombings resulted in the loss of at least 42 lives and left 77 individuals wounded (Firdous, 2009).

TERRORIST ATTACKS IN ISLAMABAD
Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, found itself ensnared in the web of terror attacks, bearing witness to devastating incidents that shook the nation to its core. Among these tragic events, a notable occurrence was the suicide attack targeting the United Nations World Food Program office, which inflicted catastrophic consequences. Additionally, Islamabad was confronted with the aftermath of the Lal Masjid siege, where female students from religious Madrassas staged a demonstration against the government, decrying the barricade and assault on the Lal Masjid. This siege resulted in the loss of 150 lives (Khan, 2009). Another grim chapter unfolded on September 20, 2008, when a dump truck laden with explosives detonated in front of the Islamabad Marriott Hotel, claiming the lives of at least 54 individuals and leaving 266 others wounded. Among the casualties were five foreign citizens, with fifteen others sustaining injuries in the harrowing attack. Furthermore, on October 28, 2010, the International Islamic University Islamabad's new campus was targeted by two suicide bombers. The assault resulted in the tragic deaths of at least six staff members and students, while more than 29 individuals suffered injuries (Ahmed, 2012).

TERRORIST ATTACKS IN BALUCHISTAN
Baluchistan has undergone a significant transformation, particularly in the aftermath of developments related to Gwadar. The region's dynamics have been influenced by various factors, including the assassination of Akbar Bugti and the exploitation of its mineral resources, coal deposits, and natural gas reservoirs. These issues have fueled discontent among the local populace, leading to internal strife. Additionally, external forces such as Iran and India, along with terrorist organizations like the Baluch Liberation Front (BLF) and the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), have exacerbated the situation. Strategically, Baluchistan holds immense importance as it serves as a nexus connecting West, South, and Central Asia. The presence of China at the deep-water port of Gwadar

further enhances Baluchistan's strategic significance, especially in the context of its implications for the United States. These various elements collectively contribute to the region's instability and the proliferation of terrorist activities (Akram, 2011).

TERRORIST ATTACKS IN SINDH

Sindh, Pakistan's second-largest province, has also been affected by the proliferation of terrorism. A notable incident occurred on May 31, 2006, when a high-intensity bomb exploded at a Shia Mosque located on Karachi's M A Jinnah Road. The attack resulted in the tragic loss of at least twenty-four worshippers, with 34 others sustaining injuries. Furthermore, Karachi, the provincial capital, witnessed a devastating terrorist attack when former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan in July 2007 under an agreement with Musharraf. Despite being welcomed by a large gathering in Karachi, the event became the target of the deadliest terrorist assault in which 140 individuals lost their lives, and over 500 others were injured. In addition to these incidents, targeted assassinations have become a significant concern in Sindh, driven by political maneuverings, ethnic tensions, and religious differences. This trend has posed a serious challenge to the province as a whole and particularly to the city of Karachi (Saima et al., 2012).

TERRORISM AND PAKISTAN MILITARY OPERATIONS

Multiple military operations have been undertaken in Pakistan to quell the activities of hostile elements, as attempts at peaceful dialogue proved ineffective in resolving their hostilities. Despite efforts by the Pakistani government to engage in negotiations with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), significant progress was elusive. Notably, Operation Rah-e-Rast, launched on April 26, 2009, targeted TTP militants and their associates in the Swat Valley. Similarly, Operation Sher-Dil (Lion Heart) commenced on September 9, 2008, focusing on eliminating approximately 2000 militants in the Bajaur Agency. Additionally, aerial strikes conducted by the Pakistan Air Force targeted militant strongholds in the Orakzai Agency. In response to militants' indiscriminate killings of minorities, Operation Sirat-e-Mustakim was initiated in the Bara Tehsil area of the Khyber Agency. Further, Operation Koh-i-Sufaid (White Mountain) was conducted in the Kurram Agency between May 2,

2011, and August 17, 2011 (Parveen et al., 2014). On June 24, 2014, Operation Zarb-e-Azb was launched in North Waziristan, an area plagued by violence predating Pakistan's independence. The Director General of Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) announced the operation's commencement, aimed at targeting both local and foreign terrorists hiding in sanctuaries within the North Waziristan Agency. The operation aimed to dismantle militant networks that had paralyzed life within the agency and subjected the local population to continuous torment and violence. In response to Operation Zarb-e-Azb, militants carried out a brutal attack, resulting in the tragic loss of 135 students at a military-run school in Peshawar, prompting nationwide outrage. This incident was denounced by Pakistan's Prime Minister as a "national tragedy unleashed by savages." The government responded by establishing military courts under the 21st Amendment, with the mandate to expedite the trial and punishment of terrorists. Operation Zarb-e-Azb gained momentum, resulting in the elimination of 2,763 terrorists and the surrender of over 9000 others within a year of its commencement (Shahid, 2015).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhance security along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to prevent cross-border movement of militants. This includes building more robust border infrastructure and increasing surveillance. Develop a holistic counterterrorism strategy that combines military operations with socio-economic development and political engagement, particularly in the affected regions like FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Invest in intelligence capabilities and modern technology to improve the accuracy of counter-terrorism operations, reducing civilian casualties and enhancing the effectiveness of operations against militants. Focus on addressing the root causes of extremism, such as poverty, lack of education, and social injustice. Implement programs aimed at economic development, education reform, and social integration in regions vulnerable to radicalization. Initiate dialogue and reconciliation efforts with militant groups willing to renounce violence. This could help in integrating disillusioned militants back into society and reducing insurgent activities. Strengthen collaboration with international partners for technical, financial, and strategic support in counter-terrorism efforts. Ensure that such collaborations respect Pakistan's

sovereignty and address local concerns. Reform the legal and judicial systems to ensure swift and fair trials of terrorists. Strengthen laws against terrorism financing and support networks. Launch public awareness campaigns to counter extremist ideologies and promote a culture of peace and tolerance. Engage community leaders and religious scholars in efforts to de-radicalize vulnerable populations. By implementing these recommendations, Pakistan can enhance its security, reduce the impact of terrorism, and create a more stable and prosperous society.

CONCLUSION

Prior to 9/11, Pakistan was relatively free from widespread terrorism but experienced sectarian conflicts. The Iranian revolution, the rise of the Taliban, and the Jihad culture in Afghanistan significantly influenced Pakistani society, leading to the growth of extremism and terrorism. The US invasion of Afghanistan post-9/11 and Pakistan's alliance with the US in the War on Terror brought severe repercussions for Pakistan. It led to an influx of terrorists into Pakistan, especially in erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), exacerbating internal security challenges. The decision to support the US resulted in a dramatic increase in terrorist attacks within Pakistan, causing immense human and economic losses. The instability spread across the country, affecting all regions with suicide bombings, targeted killings, and insurgent attacks. The porous Pak-Afghan Border (Durand Line) remained a significant security challenge. Cross-border movements facilitated the growth of militant activities in erstwhile FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, leading to the establishment of terrorist groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). US drone strikes in Pakistan aimed at targeting militants often resulted in civilian casualties exacerbated anti-US sentiment and resentment among the communities across KP in general, particularly in erstwhile FATA. The mixed impact of drone strikes made it a contentious issue within Pakistan. The War on Terror resulted in substantial human and economic costs for Pakistan, with over 83,000 people killed and economic losses amounting to approximately $126 billion over two decades. Terrorist activities spread beyond erstwhile FATA to major cities, affecting social stability. The military operations, such as Operation Rah-e-Nijat and Operation Zarb-e-Azb, eventually helped reduce terrorist activities but not without significant sacrifices. The rise of the Islamic State (IS) poses a new threat to Pakistan, exploiting the existing sectarian and religious extremism. The return of the Taliban in Afghanistan has further complicated the security situation, with potential spillovers into Pakistan.

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