



RESEARCH PAPER

The Impact of Terrorism on Political Stability in South Asia: A Comparative Study of Pakistan and Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

This research looks at the effects of terrorism on the political stability in South Asia (Pakistan and Afghanistan). Both nations have suffered from long running insurgencies and violent extremism surrounding groups like the Taliban, al Qaeda or Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. The paper tries to ascertain the extent to which terrorism has eroded state institutions and democratic rule, economic growth and assess how various counter terrorism approaches have been influenced by foreign factors and political institution of each country being effected. The historical origins, socio political forces and global aspects of the terrorism in both those nations are critically examined. In addition, the research assesses the impact of international actors (above all the United States, NATO and, regional states) on the formulation of national counterterrorism policies. This Qualitative research compares experiences in Pakistan and Afghanistan in order to make policy relevant suggestions and contribute to wider debates related to terrorism and political stability in the region.

KEYWORDS

Terrorism, Political Stability, Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations, Counterterrorism Strategies, External Actors

Introduction

Certain part of the world like Pakistan and Afghanistan has come out to be represented as hub of terrorism for past few decades in the world. The theme of Extremisms namely the Taliban, Al Qaeda and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has been the major cause of political instabilities in both these countries. Terrorism can't be said to be a safe issue in this region, it is a phenomenon that has important relations with the historical, the old economical and the political issues. Insurgencies, the sectarian crisis and cross border terrorism have Keeper stage institutions and drained the nearer in governorship and got the adjunct to attune ad growth of the economy. The effect of terrorism on political stability in Pakistan and Afghanistan which are main theatres of global war against terror, would be the research topic of this study. Although both nations have been under the threat of terrorism, the ways the two nations fight terrorism are different because of some difference in their political system, type of governance and the influence of the world outside.

As historical background of the terrorism in the region the war between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan (1979–1989) with participation with the Americans who were providing support to the Afghan mujahideen are understandable. The conflict gave rise to extremism; through it the Taliban and Al Qaeda organizations came to be which feed the terrorism in the region (Muzaffar, et. al., 2021; Rashid, 2000). The jihads on regional as well as global scale undertaken by the mujahideen, who were earlier fighting for the freedom, are being carried out by the militant groups. This change helped create a radical and extremist

pool in Afghanistan – a new age of terrorism in South Asia. After the fall of the Soviet backed government in Afghanistan in 1992 civil war broke out and the Taliban took power in 1996. It is because of the oppression of women by the Taliban and for harboring international terrorists and specifically Al Qaeda felt that the country could serve as a home for them. The invasion began what has been the war that continues to date, but the Taliban has regained most of the country's control after the United States' pullout in 2021 (Rubin, 2013). The militants in Afghanistan have spread their conflict especially to neighboring countries such as Pakistan where the militants get logistical support.

Also the war between Soviet Union and Afghanistan is also part and effect of Pakistan as well. When Afghan refugees came into the country and some militant groups emerged on the Pak-Afghan border, triggering sectarianism and insurgency the situation worsened. It is due to the emergence of groups like TTP; tribal areas of Pakistan became more unstable (Abbas H. , 2014). Apart from state, these groups attacked civilian populations and so people got a feeling of being insecure. Although the efforts of the Pakistani government at defeating terrorism have resulted in only a middle class achievement, the factors that have produced the situation have cast doubt on the likely future of democracy in the country where as the military power has usually assumed the leading position in counterterrorism operations undermining the civil authority. Terrorism as an effect to political stability in both Pakistan and Afghanistan is not so simple: it entails historical, political and socio (economic) dimensions. Terrorism in Pakistan has weakened state structures, caused political system to suffer and further deepened political divide. This time round, this has re created an antagonism between the civilian and the military governments and created a confusing political situation as the military is engaged in counter terrorism duties. The Taliban and other insurgent groups in Afghanistan would not give up their own power fight, until they threaten any government that is in place which did not allow for an inclusive government to form for such a long time. Support of third parties has been one of the most important factors for transforming the problem of terrorism in South Asia into a complex one. There are some roles to be played by the United States of America, NATO and other regional countries such as India and Iran with respect to conflict. (Muzaffar, et al., 2017). The War on Terror conducted by the United States, for example, has influenced counter terrorism measures or its political development in Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, external actors have contributed to the negative impacts in the regions such and the growth of the militants groups and the decline of the state power (Yusuf, 2018; Yaseen, et. al., 2016). Only through the understanding of these actors, can we propose strategies to the problem of terrorism in the region.

Another is terrorism that threatens the society and the economy. The growth in the economy has stopped; structures have been demolished, millions of people have been made homeless in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This loss of human capital and divination of resources to the sect or of security and defense has only increased poorly and lacking in equity. In their struggle with the drug trade linked to the Opium business they are at least as blind as unwinding such a destructive and profit yielding business is for the Taliban and other insurgents. It forms part of the biggest sources of income for the Taliban and the endless cycle of dependence on drugs and violence. According to (Fair, 2014) terrorism is said to be costing Pakistan billions of dollars with long term implication on country's development. It is difficult to resist if ideology played such an important role in the promotion of terrorism. Some organisations in South Asia have attempted to constitute themselves and recruit supporters using stories about religious and ethnic identities. The Taliban has justified its operations, as an uprising against foreign invaders and the setting of an Islamic emirate, for instance. Similarly, the TTP has used sectarian slogans, principally the rehberiyat al-Jihad or the command for Jihad issued by the self-appointed grand jury of mutitihad fiqrati mahaz (the council of Islamic ideology), to attract support for its action against the Pakistani state. There have not only sustained the conflict but have escalated it to the point that solution appears almost impossible (Abbas H. , 2014).

Second, this effect deserves consideration because of terrorism's effect on governance and other state institutions. Afghanistan government is trying to establish a stable structure, there is no hope of it happening because of the militant works are going on and corruption and bad gov are aggravating the problem. Often, military has taken over counterterrorism operations in Pakistan, putting civil authorities and future of democracy in Pakistan at risk. The absence of the state has caused terrorist groups to fill the vacuum and increase their activities as well as perpetrate acts of violence without their being apprehended. To understand the impact of terrorism on the region as a whole this paper compares the countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, although both the countries for a long time have been fighting with the problem of terrorism their approaches to fight against that evil have been quite different. Pakistan's counter terrorism strategy has been in function with that of US as well as that of Pakistan's strategic interests in South Asia and Afghanistan's strategy has been largely determined by NATO and international donor community. The aim of this study is to find differences for possible lessons for future counterterrorism in the region. The significance of this study is three fold: it will be a contribution to ongoing academic debate on terrorism and political stability and of much value to policy makers and practitioners in the fight against terrorism; and of value in South Asia as well as elsewhere in the world. In order to analyse the causes of terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the impacts of political stability and to analyse the effectiveness of the counter-terrorism measures in both countries, historical, political and military approaches will be utilized. The study aims to find policy implication to aid in dealing with this problem of terrorism and lasting stability in the region. Thus, it is argued that terrorism makes a deep impact in the political stability in Pakistan and Afghanistan and that the historical, political and the socio economic environment in the region has to be taken to account. This work therefore attempts to explain and describe how terrorism has weakened the authority of the State, supported rebellions and undermined democratisation in the two nations. This paper will compare Pakistan and Afghanistan measures towards combating terrorism and suggest measures that may be taken to avert the results of the vice. The results will contribute to the augmentation of the existing literature on terrorism and political stability; and will be useful for policy makers and practitioners in counter terrorism efforts in South Asia and the rest of the world.

Terrorism as a security threat has remained prevalent and recurrent in South Asian region especially in Pakistan and Afghanistan and its impact on the political setting and governance in both countries has remained destructive on the political and social aspects of the two countries. Due to the prolonged counter-terrorism operations, new generation terror outfits including the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and TTP still pose threats to state institutions and organisations and incite insurgencies, ethnicity and sectarianism. Thus, the nature of terrorism has been very complex to solve since it stems from historical, political, and socioeconomic relations with external actors involved. Thus, the objective of this study is to examine the experience of Pakistan and Afghanistan in an attempt to determine the similarities and differences as well as the lessons learned in order to enhance the counter-terrorism strategies and policies in the region.

Literature Review

Pakistan's Counterterrorism Challenge, Yusuf does a good job flattening Pakistan's battle against terrorism (by separating the historical, political and security elements of the extremism). The book additionally checks out how the state has actually swung backwards and forwards in between military projects and counterterrorism procedures, negotiations and political benefaction. It therefore objects on some of the topics like constant domination of the military to define security policies or trying exclusion of civilians. The author develops the point that poverty and radicalization form the primary causes of terrorism and the necessity for structural changes in education and governance. It further assesses the impact of US drone strikes and FATF (Financial Action Task Force) law on the sustainability of Pakistan's counterinsurgency efforts. Yusuf, however, acknowledges the effort by Pakistan in curbing extremism, but says there needs to be a change of policy over the long term in addition to the

use of military muscle. Consequently the book is useful to counterterrorism literature as it connects theory and practice and meaningful in terms of policy implications. Although it has disadvantages, for example, absence of quantitative research and not emphasis on the issue of civil society. The information and analysis that I receive from my sources makes it a very useful source of information and analysis for scholars, policy makers and students of international relations and South Asian security and future of counter terrorism in Pakistan and other South Asian countries (Yusuf, 2014).

Matthew Webb and Albert Wijeweera draw together the relationship between conflict and economic development with a focus on counter-terrorism in Pakistan in their book, *The Political Economy of Conflict in South Asia*, published in 2015. The chapter, "The Political Economy of Pakistan's 'War on Terror'" investigates the way the war has dampened Pakistan's economy, with a reduced foreign investment and trade and a rise in security expenditure. Instead, it concentrates on short run costs, including property and human capital losses, as well as capital flight and unfavorable investment climate. This is why the chapter argues that US and other developed countries financial aid given to Pakistan has caused their counter-terrorism policies but that depends on aid which is increasing economic dependencies. It is argued that within the security threat — economic development frame, security threat influences economic development and this interaction is viewed within a linear, structure change being necessary to halt the conflict and poor economic growth. However, the book needs also to introduce richer details about the policy actions in Pakistan and their effectiveness. Overall, the findings in this book are useful to researchers and policymakers working with terrorism, security and development issues in South Asia (Webb & Wijeweera, 2015).

In his research, Muhammad Nasir and Qazi Masood Ahmed investigates the intricate connection between economic and terrorism elements in Pakistan. Terrorism is a security problem as well as an economic problem that is intertwined with macroeconomic policies, argue the authors. The resulting study of the collected data also shows that the rise of terrorism is caused by such factors as population growth, inflation, unemployment and poverty. Specifically, it sees poverty as generating grievances which radicalises people. Moreover, political instability and ineffectiveness of governance intensify the problem via inability to put into place counterterrorism measures and economic measures. The negative economic consequences of terrorism include low FDI, capital flight, slow economic growth, a vicious cycle of poverty and insecurity which this paper assesses. In this paper we use econometric models to empirically establish a link between economic turmoil and rising acts of terrorism. While the study provides good information from terrorist's economic perspective it is particularly for Pakistan thus restricting its regional application. Nevertheless, it can be seen as a valuable inclusion into the counter terrorism literature that the point is insisted upon; that economic development as well as security measures ought to be taken to counter terrorism and its long term effects (Nasir & Ahmed, 2018).

An interesting memoir, *The Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days in Afghanistan and Pakistan* gives a satirical, if not exactly interesting, look at the War on Terror from Kim Barker's point of view. In *As a Chicago Tribune* foreign correspondent, Barker details Afghanistan and Pakistan from 2004 to 2009, talking about the ways in which Iran, the Taliban and al Qaeda's brand of terrorism had sunk in Afghanistan, describing the roots of political instability and defining how the West should best respond. Clearly the U. S. led war did not address the root socio political problems in the region if they can be called that; it in fact made them much worse (Khan, et. al., 2019). This is apparent from the corruption in the political elite as Barker writes, failings of the aid agencies, resurgent Taliban and what it means for a female journalist to be working in war. Through an evaluation of how Afghan and Pakistani governments and the foreign actors, brought this state of affairs about through bad decisions and personal alliances, she argues that Afghanistan has currently achieved this state of affairs. *The Taliban Shuffle* is quite unlike those academic analyses of the geopolitical process of engagement known as

terrorism. However, it can be considered somewhat a journalistic view of the terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan since the book lacks a complete analysis of policies in that regard (Barker, 2011).

Existing studies have looked at terrorism's historical roots, its effects on political stability and counterterrorism was undertaken in Pakistan and then separately in Afghanistan, but few comparative analyses of how varying political systems, governance structures and external influences affect each country's response to terrorism have been conducted. Furthermore, since most of the literature is more concerned with military and economic effects, not enough attention is paid to the long term effects on civil institutions, public trust and democratization processes. This research fills these gaps by directly comparing Pakistan and Afghanistan and also studies both internal governance challenges as well as the nuanced role of international actors in 'contributing' to political stability.

Material and Methods

On this research, enough information and data relating to the subject will be compiled using secondary data. Data will be collected through books, articles, other government publications, news and journals and any other online based sources as both primary and secondary sources. Collection of data for this research will be from the annual reports of government agencies, from the speeches and press releases of political leaders during their public speeches in the media and from reports and publications of international organizations.

For the research data analyses, both analytical and descriptive analyses will be used. The response to this study will be analytical comparative and to the following research questions: The first research question is: what are the complexities of terrorism in terms of political stability in South Asia? This method is very appropriate for studying historical, political and socio economic factors, that lead to the instability of the region.

Results and Discussion

The Nature of Terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Pakistan and Afghanistan's terrorism is deeply woven in a complicated mixture of ideological streams, historical legacies and geopolitical rivalries that have occurred over decades. Terrorism in the region carries contemporary origin going back to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 which elicited a resistance movement fully supported by the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (Youns & Muzaffar, 2025). It worked and this helped to create a militia of armed mujahideen combatants that eventually broke into different extremist groups, all of which were the Taliban and Al Qaeda, most notably. None of these organizations seized the vacuum left by the Soviet forces pullout and the ensuing Afghan civil war to set themselves as hegemonic in the area. In the wake of 9/11, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 ousted the Taliban regime, but failed to erase the ideology or rural redoubts which sustained it. However, in the next two decades the Taliban reformed and used local grievances and Afghan government corruption to exploit the uneven presence of international forces. In 2021 complete U.S. troop withdrawal back to my country left Afghanistan in political limbo as the Taliban returned to power in a rapid way with insurgent control (Dinstein & Yoram, 2009).

The spillover impacts of the Afghan war were very large in Pakistan. Millions of Afghan refugees flooded across the border into what was already a fertile ground for extremist madrassas. Newly established groups such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) arose to attack the government, as well as the population. Some operational gains were made by Pakistan's army led anti-terror operations, but they were tainted by structural problems like the imbalance between civilian and army bureaucracy and presumed ideological allegiances among parts of the apparatus of state. Thus, in both of these countries, terrorism cannot be viewed independently of one another as the result of the mutual occurrence of several

domestic vulnerabilities and regional geo power relations having serious ramifications for the political stability and governance (Irshad, 2011).

The Impact of Terrorism on Political Stability

Terrorism has served to greatly upset political stability and institutional workings in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan. The ramifications are closely enmeshed with the failure of governance, socio-economic deterioration, and the loss of popular confidence.

Subversion of Democratic Governance

Both nations have witnessed terrorism directly impinge on democratic progress. In Pakistan, recurring terrorist attacks against political figures, election campaigns, and state offices have undermined the public's involvement in the political process. The conjured atmosphere of fear has dissuaded citizens from participating, led to lower voter turnout, and enabled extremist ideologies to find traction. Additionally, military primacy in setting counterterrorism policies has undercut civilian institutions. Such an imbalance has promoted democratic regression and political instability. In Afghanistan, the vacuum in security generated by persistent insurgency has prevented stable and inclusive governments from being formed. Political processes have been blighted by violence, corruption, and voter confidence. The necessity of accommodating militant forces in political talks, like in the case of the Taliban, has led to power-sharing deals devoid of democratic legitimacy (Khan, 2014).

State Institution Erosion

Terrorism has further undermined the already weak institutions of states. In Pakistan, targeting the police, judiciary, and education system has weakened institutional performance. The absence of a stable national counterterrorism policy and the overbearing role of the military have weakened civilian control and institutional unity.

In Afghanistan, corruption, bad governance, and the Taliban's alternative structures undermined the central power. Terrorist organizations filled the political void in the countryside and created informal systems of governance that call into question the legitimacy of the state.

Economic Costs and Social Disintegration

Terrorism has been economically affecting both countries. Foreign direct investment has been reduced, infrastructure has been destroyed and the military spends has been increased which all limit economic growth. Pakistan is billions of dollars in terrorist losses. In Afghanistan, international aid delivery has been ineffective and the private sector skewed because security has been terrible. Poverty, joblessness and enhanced conditions of social disparity which extremists take advantage on for their recruitment, have also been a cause of increased poverty, along with joblessness, leading to further the cycle of violence and political destabilization.

Role of External Actors

Instability and terrorism in South Asia, particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan, are, of course, certainly reproducing within the two countries, but are not a domestic product. These countries' security and political environment has been influenced in powerful yet negative and positive ways by external forces.

United States and NATO Interventions

Essentially, the U.S. led intervention into Afghanistan in 2001 by intervening through its NATO allies to disband Al-Qaeda and overthrow the Taliban government. Since the start of their campaign the military had upset major terror organizations, but that was quickly forgotten as the time spent in country and civil loss of life increased and poisoned the community. Groups such as the Taliban were able to reorganize and increase their hold by portraying themselves as national liberators, owing to the fact that this backlash was also able to create an impression that they were taking that role, distancing themselves from the Americans.

The U.S. alliance in Pakistan was large scale military and economic assistance. Drone strikes aimed at militants in the tribal regions, however, meant civilian casualties—at the expense of anti-Americanism and extremism. Complex contingencies and inconsistent counterterrorism cooperation generated by dependence on Pakistan for logistical support in the war in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Dual Role and Strategic Dilemmas

Pakistan has been a key American ally in the War on Terror but also repeatedly accused of giving sanctuary to factions such as the Taliban and Haqqani Network. It has thus strained its relations with both Western and regional allies. Domestically, the alignment with American policies has resulted in political tensions, public opposition, and ideological divisions, making it more difficult to maintain its national security posture (Uddin, 2017).

Regional Rivalries and Strategic Interests

Regional actors have also shaped counterterrorism dynamics

India has invested in infrastructure and civil society in Afghanistan, evoking fears of encirclement in Pakistan.

Iran has patronized non-Taliban Shia groups in Afghanistan, adding to the sectarian aspects of the war.

China, via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is pursuing regional stability as the precondition for economic integration, in addition to quashing Uyghur militancy connections in Afghanistan.

These rivalries have complicated regional coordination on counterterrorism, creating proxy wars and uncoordinated efforts.

International Institutions and Counterterrorism Norms

Institutions like the United Nations (UN) and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) have tried to make states responsible for funding terrorism and hosting militant outfits. Pakistan, for instance, has undergone strong pressure from FATF to tighten its noose around money laundering and terror financing, which has affected local legislation and enforcement measures. Enforcement has never been consistent, and political will has usually been missing in the face of internal pressures and strategic considerations (Rafique, 2014).

Conclusion

One of the most influencing factors upon Pakistan and Afghanistan's political and governmental systems, economic growth and foreign policies is terrorism. To understand the historical causes of terrorism in South Asia we need to focus specifically on the Soviet – Afghan War and the War on Terror by the United States. Both have developed into complicated and multi – dimensional conflicts influenced by internal maladies and external factors.

Afghanistan's own ongoing insurgency and eventual return to Taliban rule has kept a vicious cycle of violence and weakness in the institutions alive. This has enabled the state to fail to set up a stable, inclusive government and thereby block progress towards democratization and national cohesion. For example, indigenous extremist organisations like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have challenged Pakistan itself with persistent threats, because of which the latter has been bitten back partially by regional instability and a lack of policy consistency. It has also reduced political cohesion and public trust in democratic institutions by giving the military such prominence in security affairs while being so weak on civilian control.

Military deployment, strategic partnerships and ideological forces of such outside actors as the United States, NATO, India, Iran and China have radically been shaping the regional security architecture. Policies counter-terrorism should have disfigured the problem; instead they generated unwanted dividends of radicalization, power vacuums and geopolitical rivalry. A comparison of the two countries finds that the problems are similar, but the responses are different because of political systems, alignments of foreign policy and institutional capability. South Asia's terrorism needs an integrated approach that integrates historical grievances, enhances governance capacity, arrests ideological extremism and develops regional partnership. In that language, durable peace and political stability in the region could have been imagined this way.

Recommendations

Both the countries should

- Enhance intelligence coordination between agencies and provincial police through a unified "Fusion Intelligence Cell."
- Accelerate fencing, biometric border control, and regulated crossing points along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border.
- Establish joint Pakistan–Afghanistan Border Monitoring Teams under international facilitation.
- Revive and expand National Action Plan provisions on hate speech, extremist content, and madrassa regulation.
- Strengthen parliamentary oversight of counter-terrorism laws.

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