

**RESEARCH PAPER****Examining the Threat of Terrorism in South Asia: A Case Study of India and Pakistan****¹Muhammad Waqas*, ²Faiza Afzal and ³Sania Sher Ali**

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Corresponding Author muhammad.waqas@uskt.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

This research examines the threat of terrorism in South Asia, with a focus on India and Pakistan. The objective is to analyse the impact of terrorism on regional security and stability. As far as the history of both countries and their geopolitics is concerned, terrorism has remained an active and essential hazard. The study employs a qualitative approach, including a review of existing literature and policy analysis. The results reveal that terrorism significantly undermines regional stability, exacerbates tensions between India and Pakistan, and poses a persistent threat to national and international security. The study finds that both countries face challenges in effectively combating terrorism due to political complexities and socio-economic factors. It is recommended that bilateral cooperation be enhanced, comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies be implemented, and international partnerships be established to address the root causes of terrorism and improve regional security.

Keywords: Nuclear Powers, Shiv Sena, Conflict, South Asia, Terrorism**Introduction**

Pak-India future conflicting links were inherited from conflict generated by diversity of thought and beliefs. This century's old socio-political, cultural and ideological distance ever aired up ambiguity, clash, conflict and chaos between Pakistan and India throughout the phases of modern history of the sub-continent. Both the neighbouring states had to meet the future of the long series of mutual distrust, uncertainty, clash and counter (Yaseen, et. al.. 2016) Pakistan and India embraced a number of conflicts i.e. earlier issues of unjust division of India by the British imperialists. The ever-recorded historic violent migration of the masses infuriated the mind-set of future generations for the manifestation of hater and arch behavior toward one another. The unsettled Kashmir conflict ever existed as dispute between Pakistan and India which again led to take birth many other conflicts like Siachin, Sir Creek, water disputes, lack of information regarding the movement of armed forces, covert plans to operate on the nuclear plant of Pakistan, arms race, cross border and state terrorism etc. India has been busy to utilize various tactics to segregate Pakistan in the regional and international community (Afzal, et. al., 2020). On one hand, India has adopted a stance that Pakistan is the only reason and factor behind all the acts of terrorism happening in India. On the other hand, India has also blamed Pakistan of being the safe heaven and breeding center of terrorism.

Pakistan has also defended and countered India's blames and false accounts diplomatically on regional and international forums. Pakistan has, at times, asked India to stop sponsoring the terrorists and anarchists on the western borders of Pakistan i.e., Afghanistan (Muzaffar, et. al., 2021). Pakistan has occasionally shown its concerns over the

functioning of Indian consulates in Kabul. Pakistan and India are two immediate neighbours. It is a well-known phrase that blessed is those who are blessed with good neighbours. As cordial and friendly relations among neighbouring countries have always been worthwhile for peace and prosperity of the region but Pakistan has not been fortunate enough in its relations with its neighbours especially with India as it has always been adopting a hostile attitude towards Pakistan since independence (Muzaffar, et. al., 2017) History of Pakistan-India relations are embodied with series of conflicts and challenges started as early as the unjust partition of sub-continent which resulted in the Kashmir dispute. Then immediately after the partition the efforts were made by the Indian government to strangulate Pakistan at its very birth by the conflicts over canal water, defense stores and cash balances. Besides the Kashmir as the core issue, the refugee's problem was also a great challenge for new born state. Masood, et. al., (2020). The attitude of distrust on the part of both sides had been a continued phenomenon.

The two neighbours fought three wars i.e., 1948, 1965, 1971 and at least four times 1987, 1990, 1999, 2002 both states were on the edge of war. Hence Pakistan and India both remained almost busy to cultivate conflicts and could not have had normal and friendly ties. (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019). The motives behind the conflicts are in the previous times and the political situation in India. The approach adopted by leadership of Congress and Muslim League towards each other during the struggle for independence caused various disputes immediately after the partition. Besides historical and ideological reasons, the psychological factor is also to be considered as one of the greatest hurdles in normalizing the relations between Pakistan and India. It is evident from the statement of Nehru, the Indian leader. He said that the division of sub-continent was the result of great psychological upset and the relationship of both states was difficult to understand for the masses as well. It was a distinct change and people were emotionally upset with this change (Burke, 1973). The people of both countries desire friendly relations between the two neighbours and have the view that it is imperative for the security and welfare of both Pakistan and India and also for the peace and prosperity of the region that the two countries should bury the hatchet and settle to a friendly and cooperative relationship. It is only possible by resolving the disputes and conflicts between Pakistan and India. It has been considered a test of regional and international leadership to establish peace and stability for the prosperity of the region and the world at large that how they contribute to settle the outstanding disputes between Pakistan and India, the two big countries of South Asia.

Literature Review

The threat of terrorism in South Asia, particularly in nuclear-armed nations such as India and Pakistan, has been a focal point of numerous scholarly works. One significant study by Ganguly and Kapur (2010) explores the historical roots and contemporary dynamics of terrorism in the region, emphasizing the complex interplay between domestic politics and external influences. Similarly, Fair (2014) delves into Pakistan's strategic use of militant proxies, arguing that its military establishment's support for terrorist groups is driven by a desire to counterbalance India's conventional military superiority. Paul (2005) discusses how nuclear deterrence in South Asia complicates counter-terrorism efforts, as both nations grapple with the dual threats of state-sponsored terrorism and independent extremist factions.

Other scholars have focused on the regional security implications of terrorism. Jones and Olken (2008) provide a comprehensive analysis of the economic and social impacts of terrorism in India and Pakistan, highlighting how persistent terrorist activities undermine economic stability and development. Tellis (2014) examines the strategic implications of terrorism on India-Pakistan relations, suggesting that the threat of nuclear escalation remains a constant backdrop to their security policies. Krepon and Wheeler (2013) explore the risk of nuclear terrorism, discussing the vulnerabilities in the nuclear command and control systems of both nations. Additionally, Sagan (2009) emphasizes the need for robust

nuclear security measures to prevent non-state actors from accessing nuclear materials, while Byman (2005) critiques the international community's response to terrorism in South Asia, calling for more coordinated efforts to address the root causes of extremism. These works collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of the terrorism threat in South Asia and the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to mitigate its risks.

Material and Methods

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine the threat of terrorism in South Asia, with a particular focus on India and Pakistan. The materials used for this research include a comprehensive review of academic literature, government reports, policy documents, and news articles. Additionally, the study incorporates data from international organizations such as the United Nations, Global Terrorism Database, and reports from security agencies in both countries. To gain deeper insights, the research also analyzes historical incidents of terrorism in India and Pakistan, exploring the socio-political context and the responses of the respective governments.

The methods used in this research involve both primary and secondary data collection. Primary data is gathered through semi-structured interviews with experts in terrorism studies, security analysts, and policymakers from India and Pakistan. These interviews provide firsthand perspectives on the evolving threat landscape and counter-terrorism strategies. Secondary data is obtained from existing literature and official records to contextualize the primary findings. The study utilizes thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes related to the impact of terrorism on nuclear security in South Asia. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of terrorism in the region and its implications for national and regional security.

Results and Discussion

Fretful Rapport of Nuclear States

The tense relationship of India and Pakistan has been emerged to territorial conflicts which have been rooted down since the partition of sub-continent. Non-resolution of all disputes has deepened the distrust between two states. Among all conflicts, terrorism has become a center staged dispute which has to be resolved on urgent basis. Terrorism became a main problem in all of the normalization processes which started many times. This process halted when Indian parliament was attacked by terrorists. Terrorism looks to become the on-going issue. In all of the terrorist attacks, India blamed on Pakistan and it shows India's coercive policy towards Pakistan. Interestingly both states have their stance on this issue. The same element is that India and Pakistan deny the involvement of terrorist activities and blame on one another for this tense relationship. In July 2001, Pakistan and India held Agra Summit. The main irritant of this process was cross border terrorism. Support for Kashmiris is called freedom struggle by Pakistan while India termed it as cross border terrorism.

Pakistan always assured India that Pakistan never gave permission to terrorists to use their soil for terrorist activities. New technologies, nuclear capabilities and rapid expansion of nuclear arms has created serious problem and threat not in South Asian region but also world at large. Increasing role of non-state actors, terrorist groups and organizations have posed serious challenge for worldwide peace. In the case of India-Pakistan, two rival nuclear states have a history of hostile relations. They have faced many terrorist threats and incidents in past and there is not seen stability and peace in future. Increasing impact of terrorist organizations in South Asian region can become a permanent source of threat of nuclear war. There is an environment of distrust, chaos and disharmony between two states. While mutual trust and behavior of cooperation could be in favor of India and Pakistan, no doubt, both states are facing traditional and non- traditional threats (Hough, 2013)

Prognostications of Indo –Pak slanted Sabotage

Terrorism is present in many forms and terrorists are involved in all brutal activities e.g. Suicide bombings, drug trafficking, kidnapping, assassination of key personalities and creating violence in whole region. As Pakistan and India have bitter relations since inception and these non-state actors and terrorist organizations have taken advantage of this bitter environment. It is said that there is existence of militant groups in Pakistan, Roul argues, "There are more than 100 extremist and separatist armed groups" (Roul Aminesh, June 5, 2010) and India has banned 35 groups for their illegal activities. India has accused many times that Pakistani religious groups like Jaish-e- Muhammad (JeM), Lashkar- e- Taiba (LeT) and Harkat-ul- Mujahideen (HUM) has been supporting local terrorist organizations in India. (Bajoria et al.,2020). Like this Pakistan claims that India has been supporting some militant groups such as Tehreek-e- Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baloch militants. Pakistan's ex-Defense Minister Khawaja Asif accused India for assisting terrorist groups in Pakistan. While Indian Defense Minister, Manohar Parrikar has stated his policy of state that "India will use terrorism to counter terrorism from other countries" (Sasikumar, 2019). The clash and mistrust have increased between Pakistan and India. Now main focus is on the terrorism and regional politics of nuclear weapons while terrorist groups and organizations are adopting new trends and new technologies to gain power and to accomplish their political objectives. Since 9/11 terrorism has become hot issue and front-page problem of international agenda. The ferocity of these terrorist attacks showed the potential of terrorists, targeting of nuclear material, radioactive sources and nuclear facilities worldwide. Nuclear capabilities are considered a cause of national security by nuclear weapons states. However, possible options and possession of these weapons by terrorists becomes a great threat for international peace and security. In South Asian region, terrorist activities have been increased with the passage of time.

Progression of home-grown and cross- border Terrorism

Terrorist activities increased with a security threat in South Asian region (Nasir, 2004). Some factors are the reality for increasing the terrorist activities i.e., political and social instability, tyrannical role of both governments and socio-economic factors which play negative role in peace process. Some challenges are the basic cause of defective national policies. (ibid) History of south Asian region is full of challenges. Regional development cannot be seen because of traditional rivalry between Pakistan and India. Non state actors have played influential and negative role. South Asian region was nuclearized on 28th May, 1998 and this raised threat of nuclear war. There are differences in religion, culture, ethnicity and language. Both states understand brutality of nuclear weapons but existence of these weapons is the permanent source of danger in the region. Strategic instability is another important question which arises in both states. Some reasons e.g., corruption, weak rule of law, bad governance, poverty, unequal distribution of resources, unemployment, intra- state conflicts and injustice are the root causes of terrorism. Terrorists have been taken advantage of sensitive relations of India and Pakistan on many occasions and created misperception between these states. In Malik's (2004) view, non- state actors have taken both states to the brink of war since 9/11. (Malik, 2003) Indian Parliament was attacked on 13th December, 2001. There was great threat of nuclear war at that time. (Chari, 2003) It was a tough time for Pakistan that it was facing international pressure after attacks of September 11. During this critical situation, Pakistan had an option of nuclear weapons along with forces. On December 30th, 2002 the then president General Pervaiz Musharraf disclosed that "would have unleashed an eccentric war' on India, even though a single Indian soldier crossed the border. Indian defense Minister George Fernandes stated that "there will be no Pakistan left, if India used its nuclear weapons". (Chari et al., 2009) Both nuclear armed neighbours were on the brink of war first time. Serious international pressure was faced by two states. This episode had great impact on future relations of Pakistan and India. Bilateral talks and discussions were started for normalization process. Mumbai terrorist attacks in

2008 were another terrible incident in India which halted peace process between two states. Major commercial and financial places were the main targets of ten terrorists who used grenades and machine guns. Three days were taken by Indian security forces to defeat terrorists, nine of whom were killed. It has been referred as India's 9/11 and at least 172 people were killed in this terrorist attack. It was again an attempt of non- state actors to provoke India to engage in war. Terrorists completely were aware of the after effects of these attacks.

They tried to kill common people at commercial and economic places without having any threat of their own death and they used common tactics and normal weapons. India blamed Pakistan for Mumbai terrorist attacks but Pakistan condemned it. Pakistan and India knew about great risks of nuclear war. If serious steps were taken by both India and Pakistan, it could escalate a full-fledged nuclear war which could not be in favor of both states. Nuclear and security strategies remained unclear after these attacks and both states were engaged in direct military confrontation. (Bhushan, 2002). After effects of November 2008 Bombay terror attacks showed tension between leaders of India or Pakistan and they faced international pressure and crisis at that time. After this tension, both armies were on the position of eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation which is called 2001-2002 military standoffs. It was the time when both countries were facing threat of nuclear war. Anger was seen in Indian society at that time. In this case, domestic pressures on Indian government to use force or by tit-for-tat game and to agitate Pashtun community for making the troubles on Pakistan-Afghanistan border. It would be a bad result for both states. In this situation leaders of India and Pakistan should rethink that these strategies will never go in their favor.

Indian Department about Radicalness in Jammu and Kashmir

Pakistan is responsible of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. With the concept of jihad, Pakistan is involved in every activity and wants to fulfil its policy for the liberation of Kashmir from India. Very after the inception of Pakistan, its forces were entered into valley to annex Kashmir. Policy that was adopted in 1947-48 is continued till present. Infiltration in 1965, the second India-Pak war, Pakistan proxy wars since 1988 and the Kargil war in 1999 showed that Pakistan favored a policy of hostility in Kashmir (Saraka, 2016). The separatist movement started in Kashmir and later on become Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). After that, Pakistan sponsored Islamist groups took over the charge. This movement transformed into a terror campaign with the involvement of Pakistan's intelligence agency like ISI. Weapons, arms and ammunitions were smuggled from Pakistan. Yousef Bodansky, an analyst, stated, main mission of these militant groups was to terrorize the common people of Kashmir and to whip up anti-Indian sentiments and to assume different projects to destabilize the state. Kashmiri youth was taking training from Pakistan. In 1990-91, extremist groups ruled on major towns of the valley. It was considered that military organizations are backed by Pakistan. Due to security forces actions, other organizations were merged into militant groups with the passage of time. ISI of Pakistan was the main instrument who was facilitating these movements and provided weapons across the border of Kashmir. Foreign militants came from other areas of the world to help Kashmiris in holy war and to target important places of India. ISI is playing an important role in providing weapons and training to jihadi groups. The aim of these groups and organizations is to deteriorate India's development, target the crowded, religious places and major institutions (Chadha, 2005).

Pakistan Escaping Blame Game

Regional terrorists were playing their role in destabilization of the region. Peshawar school incident and many other terrorist incidents occurred on the soil of Pakistan in which thousands of people have been killed but Pakistan reacted sensibly and avoided blame game. Although both states have nuclear capabilities and they have to avoid such misperceptions and seek a more stable and implementable solution for good relationship in future. They

may have to settle peace process again and understand that present hostility in Kashmir is not in favour of national interests of India and Pakistan. With this it will reduce pressure of testing of new devices and new kinds of weapons and also international pressure on both states will be lessened.

Terrorism in South Asia and its Chief Drivers

South Asia is in one of the most populous regions of the world that includes almost a quarter of the world total population. Despite achieving consistent Rapid economic growth over the last several years and possessing huge potential for regional development and prosperity, the region is marked by numerous political Economic social cultural inequalities which has encouraged various ethnic, social and religious bunches to hunt their illegitimate and self-centered goalmouths, these Terrorist groups are mostly functioned for the acquisition of communal dominance, fiscal attraction , anti-governmental & faith inspiration and political overheads also use these groups for the disbanding of the ruling class. It is important understand here the key drivers of activism, which lead to encounters exclusively in India and Pakistan. The violent extremism obstructs the development in number of ways, therefore there is nexus between ferocious extremism and development challenges, scarcity of food and water, fragile judicial system, socio-political exclusion, unfortunate authority, disenchantment with democracy, economic scrub, security issues, economic inequality, lack of economic opportunities, trust deficit and coordination challenges are some of the key drivers for extremism (Javaid, 2013).

Table 1
Terrorist Attacks in South Asia (2000-2020)

Year	Incidents of Killing	Civilians	Security Forces	Terrorists/Insurgents /Extremists	Not Specified	Total
2000 *	2666	1668	1510	5216	35	8429
2001	3623	1955	1638	4935	198	8726
2002	3681	1668	1457	7216	255	10596
2003	3259	1640	866	4101	280	6887
2004	2993	1640	1239	3550	278	6707
2005	2830	1998	920	3346	152	6416
2006	2870	2286	1767	4542	640	9235
2007	3171	2718	1514	5796	740	10768
2008	5056	3080	2459	14205	752	20496
2009	3473	13142	2755	12458	897	29252
2010	2213	2322	875	5756	372	9325
2011	2167	2774	875	3250	255	7154
2012	2914	3026	870	2888	277	7061
2013	2729	3257	865	2069	377	6568
2014	2163	1910	680	3756	267	6613
2015	1447	1064	493	2851	76	4484
2016	1090	788	473	1507	68	2836
2017	779	657	393	1033	82	2165
2018	656	584	341	720	10	1655
2019	490	566	275	441	0	1282
2020	194	91	132	254	0	477
Total**	50464	48834	22397	89890	6011	167132

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) Institute for conflict Management

Findings

The examination of terrorism in South Asia, particularly in the context of India and Pakistan, reveals a complex interplay between regional instability and national security concerns. Both countries have experienced significant terrorist activities, which have had profound impacts on their socio-political landscapes. In India, incidents such as the Mumbai

attacks in 2008 underscored vulnerabilities in urban centers and raised questions about intelligence and response capabilities. Similarly, Pakistan has faced numerous terrorist attacks, including those on military installations and public spaces, highlighting the pervasive threat within its borders. The presence of various militant groups operating across both nations has exacerbated tensions and created an environment of perpetual insecurity.

Furthermore, the geopolitical rivalry between India and Pakistan exacerbates the terrorism threat. Historical animosities and territorial disputes, particularly over Kashmir, have fueled extremist narratives and provided fertile ground for terrorist recruitment and operations. Cross-border terrorism remains a significant issue, with both countries accusing each other of harboring and supporting militant groups. This mutual distrust complicates counter-terrorism efforts and hampers regional cooperation. The involvement of state and non-state actors in supporting terrorism has also been identified as a critical challenge, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of the underlying political dynamics.

The threat of terrorism in the region is compounded by the presence of nuclear arsenals in both India and Pakistan. The potential for terrorist groups to target nuclear facilities or exploit political instability to gain access to nuclear materials represents a grave security concern. This study finds that while both countries have taken steps to secure their nuclear assets, gaps in intelligence, coordination, and infrastructure resilience persist. The findings emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that include not only military and intelligence solutions but also socio-economic and political reforms to address the root causes of terrorism. Enhanced bilateral and international cooperation is essential to mitigate these threats and ensure regional stability.

There are many problems and issues in border management and need to be resolved on permanent basis for durable settlement. This has become a permanent source of tension between two states. Different standards of security require different geographical areas. However, at border areas, there is need of reduction of tension between neighbouring countries. Borders can be better managed through administrative machinery who can continue border rules and regulations to be followed in disputed areas. Proper supervision of borders is vital for state security. At diverse areas of borders there are specific border problems which have to deal and manage properly with resolving these border disputes, the issues of cross border terrorism can be handled properly.

Conclusion

It's been a long and difficult road for Pakistan and India, as they have fought three full-fledged wars, limited war (1999), and many times faced tense and apprehensive relations. There is a common threat of terrorism in both countries, which must be addressed through the development of an integrated counter-terrorism strategy. Terrorist groups do not want peace between both nuclear states. It must be prevented at all costs that the peace process comes to a halt. Interests of the elites who patronage terrorism and derailed the peace process are to be understood and policy makers of both states must understand the blame game. Politics of terrorism is not fruitful for both states but easier for terrorists and also it is a home-grown phenomenon which gives room for cross-border terrorism. There is no way that Outmoded Peace Talks can succeed without the steadfastness of core stiffness between the two Tigers since terrorism has rendered all states as vulnerable as South Asia itself.

Recommendations

- Issues should be identified which promote terrorism and extremism in South Asian region. A lot of comprehensive study and research should be conducted in research

centres to understand the main causes of terrorism and violence in both states. Joint research studies should be conducted by scholars and academicians to find out solutions of terrorism in South Asian region.

- Awareness of peace and tolerance should be promoted in educational institutions. Tolerance and non-violence should be included in the syllabi of educational system and positive picture of both states should be taught to the students so that minds of the students could be clear and think positively. Scholars and researchers should focus on research which aims at the issue of terrorism and to work on a practicable mechanism not only to address the issue but to solve the problem of terrorism in India and Pakistan.
- Print and electronic media plays a vital role in establishing image in the minds of people. There is a need for both media to avoid misreporting and wrong coverage of facts in any terrorist act. Either in India or Pakistan if there is happening of terrorist attack, all facts should be presented without mishandling of any news or if there is occurrence of misreporting to misperception of any terrorist act, media should be encountered.
- There are some root causes of terrorism and it is a home grown' phenomenon in India and Pakistan. If both governments focus on human security and try to resolve all problems which a common man faces in a society e.g., unemployment, poverty and weak rule of law should be handled properly. Some precautionary measures should be taken by India and Pakistan for socio-economic reforms and decrease of violence and intolerance at grassroots' level.
- If one country thinks first to engage the other country in dialogue process then it has to take a practical step.
- If any pre-condition leads both countries to take some measures both have to make a remarkable or excellent instance of it. All the issues like Kashmir, Terrorism, Bilateral trade etc. need to be considered on permanent basis.
- Both states have to deal with their domestic problems and should point out the elements and factors which are the main causes of interruption of normalisation process.
- Ability should be produced in policy makers to address core issues of both states at a primary root level.

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