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RESEARCH PAPER

Militancy in Pakistan: Evaluating its Consequences for National Security and International Relations

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research is to explore the non-state actors in Pakistan, especially militant groups, that are threatening the national security and stability of Pakistan. Pakistan has been facing this problem since the 1980s during the Soviet-Afghan War. Pakistan has suffered a huge loss of human lives and also economically due to militancy. Despite various military operations and counter-terrorism strategies, militant groups continue to pose a threat to national security. This study is important because it seeks to understand the dynamics of militancy in Pakistan and identify effective strategies to counter this threat. Through a qualitative case study employing narrative analysis, this research is based on primary and secondary data sources, including expert interviews, existing literature, and media reports. The study finds that militant groups, such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), pose a significant threat to Pakistan's internal and external security, having developed complex networks that exploit local grievances and ideologies. Sympathy to recruit and radicalize fighters. The study suggests that a multi-dimensional approach will be required to deal with this threat, which will include military operations, intelligence-based operations, socio-economic development projects, and dialogue with the local population; regional cooperation and international assistance was also highlighted as vital to combat the menace of militancy in Pakistan.

Introduction

Non-state actors, although not directly associated with a government, hold significant political influence and territorial dominance. Examples of non-state actors (NSAs) that could resort to violence in pursuit of their objectives include companies, private financial institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), paramilitary groups, armed guerrilla warfare resistance groups, terrorist organizations and militant groups (Longley, 2022). Militancy involves using aggressive, sometimes forceful tactics to accomplish political, ideological, or social objectives. Militant organizations or individuals commonly take on an aggressive approach and may participate in activities such as armed conflict, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, or insurgency. While certain militant groups aim to defy government authority or strive for independence, others have wider ideological or religious goals in mind. Militancy is commonly linked with a readiness to employ radical strategies, setting it apart from calmer or less extreme types of political activism or promotion (Yusuf, 2014).

Militancy has become a major threat to the sovereignty of states and global security in the 21st century. Non-governmental entities, especially armed factions, have been

growing in power, disrupting traditional ideas of authority in the global system. Pakistan has seen the emergence of several militant groups since the late 20th century, with many crossing borders and affecting both domestic security and regional stability Pakistan has been highlighted in the global lens owing to the aforementioned groups' affiliation with terrorist networks, especially after 9/11, and the War on Terror afterwards. (Firdous, 2009).

The roots of militancy in Pakistan are complex and diverse; they have been shaped by history, politics, and ideology (Muzaffar, Khan& Karamat, 2017). Militant groups have evolved mainly as a result of the Afghan Jihad in the 1980s, inter-state wars, and domestic factors. These entities tend to operate independently of state structures, but in some instances, have also been regarded as important assets in the conduct of foreign relations with India and Afghanistan for example. However, such groups, through their activities, have had serious implications in the sphere of security, international relations and image of Pakistan (Azam ,2014; Muzaffar, Khan & Yaseen, 2019).

This research aims to analyze the role of militancy as a non-state actor in Pakistan, specifically looking at its historical growth, its effect on internal security, and its impact on Pakistan's foreign relations. this research seeks to increase understanding of the way non-state actors may compete with and undermine state sovereignty and [influence] regional security through an analysis of relevant militant groups, state counterterrorism processes, and the wider international environment. It also provides recommendations for addressing the challenges posed by militancy in order to help make Pakistan a more secure country and facilitate regional stability.

Literature Review

Pakistan, often referred to as the center of global terrorism, is dealing with a major counter-terrorism (CT) problem as a result of attacks on the state by Islamic organizations. The book delves into the different aspects of the challenge, such as political, legal, law enforcement, financial, and technical factors, providing a detailed examination of Pakistan's ability and motivations to combat Islamist terrorism. It also examines unconventional sources of power crucial to Pakistan's ability to control militancy, including the shortcomings of political institutions, the importance of policing, the criminal justice system, hindering the funding of militancy, and the actions taken by militants. The book also emphasizes controlling the use of media and technology. The authors give a roadmap for Western and Pakistani policymakers to tackle deficiencies in Pakistan's CT strategy, highlighting the fact that military action alone will not resolve Pakistan's militancy issues (Yusuf, 2014).

Non-state actors have become more influential in international politics. This encyclopedia entry examines non-state actors, a broad term that consists of people, global organizations, businesses, NGOs, industry groups, Militant groups, MNCS, terrorists, and criminal organizations. It then explores the historical background of the concept and examines the involvement of non-state actors in international law negotiation, codification, and litigation Finally, the section discusses non-state actors and their influence on peace and security issues (Wagner, 2009).

Pakistan has been challenged by militant organizations for over ten years. Almost 60,000 individuals have lost their lives up to this point. In addition to this, Pakistan has suffered a loss exceeding 102.5 billion dollars. Additionally, individuals throughout Pakistan experienced the most severe acts of terrorism. Militants in Pakistan target mosques, schools, religious seminaries, markets, public spaces, military, law enforcement, border areas, courts,and politicians. Their radical agenda is reflected in the political and economic instability that has resulted. The Pakistani government and military have been combatting

this wave of militancy for more than ten years. In this scenario, it is crucial to explore the origins of extremism in Pakistan (Yaseen, & Muzaffar, 2018; Azam & Javaid, 2017).

Pakistan is confronted with security challenges from various directions, such as societal and economic breakdown, sectarian conflicts, strained civil-military relations, political divides, and environmental decline. Nevertheless, the most significant security risk stems from non-state actors (NSAs) and acts of terrorism. The author evaluates the threat of nuclear terrorism by NSAs in Pakistan using empirical evidence. It adopts an interpretive perspective on global worries surrounding nuclear security in Pakistan. In spite of ongoing security challenges, Pakistan has implemented measures to strengthen legal and institutional protections for its nuclear resources, as well as the capability to obtain technology and materials that could be used in weapons by non-state actors (Ali & Sadiq, 2023).

Pakistan's militancy became more intricate after 2001, with the Red Mosque incident in 2007 and the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2008 heightening militant actions. Many casualties have occurred in suicide bombings aimed at the military, police, public gatherings, and various locations. The scenario turned dire following the "Rah Rast" military offensive against insurgents in Swat, Malakand, and Buner. Terrorists have targeted prominent cities such as Lahore and Peshawar, citing retaliation for the Swat operation. The origins of terrorism in Pakistan can be attributed to social factors like poverty, narcotics trade, religious influence from Afghan refugees, religious schools, and global power struggles (Firdous, 2009).

Militarization in Pakistan has emerged as a significant security issue. Terrorist groups have killed over 40 thousand Pakistani citizens. Insurgents have attacked governmental agencies and defied official authority. The origins of the increase in militancy and extremism can be traced back to historical events from both the past and the present. Terrorist groups function by claiming to act in the name of religion and justify their activities as Jihad. The origins of militancy can be linked back to specific internal and external factors: political unrest, the 1979 Afghan Jihad, military governments, and poor socio-economic conditions. Inadequate democratic systems have allowed extremism to thrive. Therefore, terrorism is being employed to combat extremist beliefs and carry out the goals of militant organizations (Karamat, Muzaffar & Shah, 2019; Azam, 2014)

Prism is a global issue that hinders growth in underdeveloped countries. Terrorist networks' digital and cyber capabilities have posed a challenge for non-traditional security measures. The internet has many benefits, but it may also be used to transfer information among terrorist organizations. Using digital information to recruit target populations into terror networks or plan unlawful intimidation tactics. These digital platforms advance their agendas. Advancements in technology are often abused by radicals, criminals, and non-state organizations, despite their potential benefits. Terrorists now employ huge data, sophisticated networking systems, and cryptography, among other digital components. It's crucial that non- state entities are prohibited from engaging in such operations (Baloch, & Shah 2022).

Pakistan's security worries have shifted as a result of global conflict dynamics and the country's vulnerability to domestic security threats. The fight against terror, including APS strikes, has had a devastating impact on the economy, infrastructure, and the general well- being of the population. A transition from geopolitics to geo-economics has been recognized as required. The Indian practice of enlisting non-state actors to support her agenda towards Pakistan presents a significant security threat. The securitization theory has helped Pakistan realize that the focus of security threats has changed from traditional concerns about India to a recognition of non-traditional security issues as more pressing. This move from geopolitics to economic geography is required to meet the country's security demands (Awan, 2023).

The trend of militancy is increasing quickly in Pakistan. Militant groups have become a significant obstacle in combating terrorism within the country. Militants in Pakistan are targeting mosques, educational institutes, religious seminaries, markets, public places, armed forces, police, border areas, crops, judiciary, and politicians. The radical agenda is manifested in the resulting political and economic instability. Pakistan's government and military have been combatting this wave of militancy for over ten years. It is important to examine the origins of militancy in Pakistan in this particular context. Thispaper seeks to elucidate the primary factors that lead to militancy in Pakistan. The focal points of discussion are political, economic, religious, and societal sources (Idrees et al., 2024).

Read various articles, research papers and books about militancy as a non-state actor in Pakistan. Authors discuss militancy as Non-State Actors in different ways. After reviewing the previous literature, I gained a lot of knowledge because everyone wrote in a unique and very good way. But Several important gaps are evident in the literature on militancy as a non-state actor in Pakistan. There is limited research on the complex and sometimes collaborative interactions between governments and militant organizations, particularly in cases where militancy is used as a tool in foreign policy. Furthermore, research on regional differences is lacking, failing to consider how unique socio-political factors influence extremism in different provinces. The social consequences of militancy on civilians, such as economic, psychological and social impacts, still require further investigation. Furthermore, although various counterterrorism tactics have been implemented, studies generally do not assess their lasting effects, particularly in terms of the continued success of military and extremism operations. Finally, more research is needed to fully understand the impact of international actors, such as funding and ideological exchanges, on local militancy in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

This research employs qualitative methodology to explore the role of militancy as a non-state actor in Pakistan. Using a case study approach in the research analyze the historical, political, and security-related aspects of militancy through a comprehensive review. Secondary sources such as official documents of governments of Pakistan, speeches and statements of leaders, historical documents, books, articles, reports, newspapers are used. Moreover, contents carefully analyzed to understand the basic themes of study.

Results and Discussion

Meaning of militancy

Before analyzing the trend of militancy in Pakistan, it is necessary to explain it separately in its current form. The term militaris comes from the 15th century Latin word militaris, which means "to serve as a soldier". The corresponding modern concept of militia as a defensive organization evolved from the Anglo-Saxon "fared". Typically, a militant uses force in a claimed struggle against oppression. But the word is sometimes used to refer to anyone and everyone with an opinion or cause (e.g. militant Christian, militant atheist). People in society may use the terms 'militants' in the same way as 'terrorists.

Militant groups in Pakistan

Ashkre-e-Taayba (LeT), also known as Al-Mansoorian, Jama'at ud-Dawa, and Markaz al-Dawat-ul-Irshad (MDI), is an Islamic extremist organization active in Kashmir. Established in 1987 by Zafar Iqbal, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, and Abdullah Azzam, LeT focuses on establishing Islamic governance in Jammu and Kashmir and India. The organization operates 16 Islamic institutions, 135 secondary schools, an ambulance service, mobile clinics, blood banks, and numerous seminaries throughout Pakistan. It maintains

connections with religious/military organizations globally, including the Philippines, Middle East, and Chechnya (Yaseen, Jathol & Muzaffar, 2016).

Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) is another important militant organization in Pakistan, established in March 2000 by former HUM chief Maulana Masood Azhar. JeM is a global Islamic movement based on Sharia principles and stands for the eradication of wrongdoing and the demand for full compliance with Sharia. Most members are from rural areas, small towns, and mosques based in the UK, including the Kashmiris and Punjabis.Jaish Muhammed is good at raising funds and has 30 tehsil offices across India.

Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP): The most powerful and well-armed of all sectarian corporations in the country It became more important following the Iranian revolution in 1979. The SSP, or Sipah-e-Sahaba, is a sectarian Sunni group that belongs to the Deobandi sect and is led by Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, with an anti-Shia agenda focused on a single point. Through some external mappings, SSP has gone national and became the biggest Islamic organization with nearly one million peoples in the funnel. The SSP was banned by the Pakistani authorities in January 2002 but it was remaned as Mililant.

A new party Millat Islamia (MeI) was created by Maulana Azam Tariq (former SSP chief) and his associates to bring forth an Islamic revolution. Over the years, SSP has gained control over nearly all regions of Pakistan and now it is known as one of the strong propaganda arms of name of Pakistan. SSP actions have exacerbated communal tensions in Pakistan with dire consequences for regional security.

The Pakistani Taliban or Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is a terror outfit formed in 2007 as a group of several extremest factions united over their ambition to overthrow the Pakistani state and establish their version of Sharia as the law of the land in an Islamic emirate. Operating primarily in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, TTP has on many occasions launched high-profile attacks — including suicide bombings and assaults on military and civilian locations — that have drawn tens of thousands of deaths. The group has maintained ties to al-Qaida and finances its operations through extortion, kidnappings and donations, and has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States since 2010. The TTP has seen several leadership changes, and as of 2018 the current amir is Noor Wali who continues the group's aggressive activities against Pakistan's security forces and those they consider enemies including foreigners (Sayed, 2021).

Current situation of militancy in Pakistan

The current state of militancy in Pakistan is defined by a disturbing rise of violence, especially in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan especially in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, which are significantly affected by cross-border militant operations (Muzaffar, Khan& Yaseen, 2021). In 2024, the nation experienced a notable rise in militant assaults, with around 785 occurrences documented in just the first ten months, leading to 951 fatalities and close to 1,000 injuries. This increase indicates a worsening security situation, with KP representing roughly 87% of these incidents. The circumstances have escalated to a concerning degree, with August 2024 emerging as the deadliest month in six years, underscoring the seriousness of the danger presented by militant organizations.

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) remains a significant entity in this environment, with reports suggesting that the count of allied militant factions has increased to approximately 60 Reports indicate that the TTP's activities are backed by groups situated in Afghanistan, heightening worries about cross-border violence and making Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategies more complex. In spite of continuous military efforts to address these threats, difficulties persist because of insufficient political commitment and

poor coordination between federal and provincial agencies. Public confidence in the security system is declining, as individuals voice their anger about the rising number of targeted murders and the believed ineffectiveness of law enforcement agencies (Janjua, 2024).

Impacts of militancy on Pakistan's internal and external security

Internal impacts on Pakistan's security

Terrorist attacks

Terrorist attacks in Pakistan, particularly in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have surged in recent years. The Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) has been particularly active, claiming responsibility for numerous attacks aimed at security forces and civilians. The BLA's motivations stem from grievances over the exploitation of Baluchistan's natural resources by the central government and foreign entities, particularly China (Yaseen, Afridi, & Muzaffar, 2017). In August 2024, Pakistan experienced its deadliest month in six years, with 254 fatalities attributed to militant attacks across the country, including significant violence in Baluchistan.

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has also intensified its operations, orchestrating high-profile attacks against military and civilian targets. The security situation remains precarious, with coordinated attacks becoming more common. In November 2024, at least 74 people were killed across multiple attacks in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including armed assaults on civilians and security personnel. The Pakistani government has responded with increased military operations aimed at countering these threats, but challenges persist due to the difficult terrain and local support for some militant factions (Muzaffar, Karamat, & Saeed, 2018).

Violence continues to have great economic consequences, as the strategic allure of Baluchistan for projects like CPEC has both development and conflict. Seasonal infrastructure attacks on CPEC components have raised fears that foreign interests in partnership and development programs will be endangered by instability. The issue of terrorism in Pakistan is more complex involving various terrorist organizations with different objectives and methods. More effort is needed to deal with these issues, including terrorism and restoring peace for development purposes in the region (Sajid, 2024).

Target killings

Pakistan has been plagued by a cycle of violence and targeted killings, with over 3,000 people killed in targeted attacks from 2012 to 2018. These attacks often target politicians, activists, journalists, and minority groups, often linked to militant groups or sectarian organizations. The Supreme Court has ordered enhanced security and accountability for perpetrators, but little improvement has been seen. Human rights organizations have criticized Pakistan's government for not protecting vulnerable populations, and Amnesty International has documented multiple instances of targeted killings. The Protection of Pakistan Act, passed in 2014, has been criticized for its application and lack of enforcement. Civil society organizations have called for policy reform and strengthening law enforcement capacity. Pakistan's national action plan to counter terrorism and sectarian violence is varying, but there is no clear answer to targeted killings. These attacks undermine Pakistan's stability and efforts to establish the rule of law, fueled by extremist ideologies and weak institutions (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Ishfaq, 2016; Hussnain, 2024).

Sectarian Violence

Sectarian violence in Pakistan has deep historical roots, influenced by political, social, and religious dynamics. The rise of sectarian violence can be traced back to the 1970s, with policies favoring Sunni interpretations of Islam leading to the marginalization of Shia communities and the emergence of militant Sunni groups. The proliferation of madrassas has further exacerbated sectarian tensions, with each sect running its own madrassa, which serve as breeding grounds for extremist views and provide manpower for militant organizations. Economic underpinnings of sectarian violence are highlighted, with reduced state services contributing to potential radicalization. Foreign influences, such as the Iranian Revolution of 1979, have also contributed to to sectarian violence (Siddiqui, 2015).

Radicalization and Extremism

The rise of radicalization and extremism spreads with multiple causatives in Pakistan. State-sponsored policies are marginalizing various sects, proliferating rabid Sunni interpretations and inflaming sectarian tensions. A number of explanations can be found for the radicalization of young people in Pakistan, socio-economic aspects such as unemployment, poverty and lack of quality education push youth towards extremism because they want a way out of the grim realities of poverty, and extremist organizations provide the youth with them and this is the reason for them to join the ranks of extremists. Argument Scheid led to a normalization of violent jihad in 1980s Afghanistan with a surge of recruits fighting under a banner of religious duty. Education, on the one hand, has been accused of promoting extremist ideologies and inhibiting critical analysis. Some political factors, including poor governance, corruption and human rights violations, have encouraged radicalization as well. The digital landscape has rendered radicalization a more complex phenomenon, as the internet has become used as recruitment tools for extremist organizations. It is important for Pakistan to embed counter radicalization efforts within socio-economic programs, to target poverty and unemployment, and to work closely with communities to rebuild trust and address community grievances that fuel radical thought. It is important to note that any framework or strategy to combat extremism in Pakistan must be holistic in nature duly considering the aforementioned multifaceted and interconnected factors(Abbas, 2014).

External impacts on Pakistan's security

Afghanistan and Taliban

Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan and the Taliban has been a complex and significant issue, particularly after the Taliban resumed power in 2021. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has been gaining strength, causing tensions between Islamabad and Kabul. The TTP has executed over 124 terrorist attacks since the Taliban took over, raising security concerns in Pakistan and drawing Pakistani military airstrikes on TTP camps in Afghanistan. Afghan officials have protested against military operations, but have been unable to restrain TTP activities. The Pakistani military's use of the Taliban as a tool against Indian influence in Afghanistan has resulted in unintended consequences, with the TTP causing more violence in Pakistan. This situation makes Pakistan's foreign policy more complex as it has to manage its ties with the Afghan Taliban while dealing with security risks from the TTP. The increase in acts of violence by militants in Pakistan, which saw a 79% rise in early 2023, highlights the difficulties Islamabad faces in handling domestic security while cooperating with the Taliban government (Nadery, 2023).

Pakistan US relations and war on terror

The U.S.-Pakistan relationship has been shaped by historical backgrounds, strategic interests, and geopolitical dynamics since the War on Terror began in the early 2000s. The U.S. sought Pakistan's assistance in combating terrorism after the September 11, 2001 attacks, resulting in substantial military and economic assistance. However, tensions have

persisted due to varying priorities and views on potential threats. Pakistan's perceived backing of terrorist groups, such as the Haqqani Network and Lashkar-e-Taiba, has been a significant issue. The War on Terror has also pushed Pakistan to take strong action against militant groups within its territories. The revival of the Taliban has intensified the animosity with the TTP, which despite a major crackdown, has been able to raise its operational capacity and level of attacks. While relations between the U.S. and Pakistan plummeted to new lows with military aid cut during the Trump years over Pakistan's support of terrorist groups. Relations are further complicated by the changing geopolitical situation, including, increasingly, the growing power of China in Pakistan (Ghani, Ahmed & Muzaffar, 2017).

Border Security

Pakistan's border security, particularly along its border with Afghanistan, has been significantly impacted by the resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) following the Taliban's 2021 takeover. The TTP has been using Afghan land as a secure base for attacks, causing increased violence and instability in border areas like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. Pakistani border forces have stepped up efforts to prevent infiltration attempts, sparking recent clashes involving militants attempting to cross from Afghanistan. The worsening security situation has led Pakistan to urge the Afghan Taliban to efficiently oversee their portion of the border, which spans almost 2,600 kilometers. However, Taliban leaders in Kabul have rejected these claims, stating they do not shelter extremist organizations with plans to target nearby nations. The ongoing strain complicates diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and historical animosities and geopolitical factors add complexity (Gul, 2024).

India and Pakistan Tension

Militancy has a significant and complex influence on relations between India and Pakistan, affecting diplomatic connections, security strategies, and the stability of the region. Pakistan's continued use of terrorism for political purposes has resulted in increased tensions and a cycle of violence that hinders progress towards peace and cooperation. (Kugelman, 2019)

Historical Background of Militancy in India-Pakistan Relations

Ever since British India was divided in 1947, the Kashmir conflict has remained a key issue in India-Pakistan relations, as both nations stake their claim on the region. Militancy, specifically through cross-border terrorism, has played a major role in fueling this conflict. Pakistan has been alleged to provide backing to different militant organizations like Jaish-e- Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), responsible for attacks on Indian forces and civilians in Kashmir. A significant event took place on February 14, 2019, as a suicide bombing carried out by JeM resulted in the deaths of 40 Indian paramilitary soldiers in Pulwama, causing a sharp increase in tensions between the two countries (Kugelman, 2019).

Pulwama Attack

The Pulwama attack signaled a shift in India-Pakistan relations. India launched airstrikes on a supposed JeM training camp in Balakot, Pakistan in response, which was the first instance since 1971 of Indian forces penetrating Pakistani territory for an airstrike. Pakistan escalated the situation by shooting down an Indian fighter jet and capturing its pilot, who was eventually freed as a goodwill gesture. Nevertheless, these incidents highlighted the delicate peace between the two countries with nuclear weapons and showed how extremism can quickly lead to armed conflict (Ahmed, 2019).

Diplomatic Involvement

Militancy has greatly hindered diplomatic attempts between India and Pakistan. Despite multiple efforts to engage in conversation through high-level meetings and suggestions for peace talks, these efforts have frequently been disrupted by acts of terrorism carried out by organizations based in Pakistan. After the Uri attack in September 2016, in which 19 Indian soldiers were killed, India carried out surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC), causing additional tension in diplomatic relations. The Indian government has repeatedly asked Pakistan to take effective measures against terrorist groups based on its territory, but Islamabad has only responded with denials and limited steps.

Implications on internal politics within the country

Militancy also heavily influences the political landscape of both nations. In India, instances of cross-border terrorism commonly result in heightened nationalist feelings and demands for robust military actions from politicians. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration has used these feelings to strengthen its backing, positioning itself as strong against terrorism and refusing to engage in talks with Pakistan until concrete measures are taken against terrorist groups. On the other hand, in Pakistan, the military frequently employs the story of external threats from India to validate its actions and uphold its power over civilian leadership(Council Foreign Relations, 2024).

Challenges in Maintaining Regional Stability and Security

The continued problem of militancy adds to the overall regional instability in South Asia. India's view of Pakistan as a supporter of terrorism not only creates challenges in bilateral relations, but also influences India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan and China. Islamabad is wary of India's increasing relationship with Afghanistan, as it is concerned about being surrounded by unfriendly neighboring countries backed by outside powers such as the United States and India. This situation worsens security challenges as both nations feel pressured to boost their military strength, including nuclear weapons, raising the likelihood of misjudgments in times of crisis.

Infiltration and Infiltration routes

Militancy is the most important factor that affects infiltration/ infiltration cluster in Pakistan. As militant outfits, namely the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), assumed a dominant position, they have incrementally used an array of infiltration routes to launch operations in Pakistan. The still-worsening conditions have been exacerbated by the changing landscape in Afghanistan with the Taliban's return to power in 2021, creating new opportunities for these groups to operate across borders.

Resurgent Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

The TTP has become a significant danger to Pakistan's security, utilizing the weak border with Afghanistan to carry out assaults. After the Taliban's seizing of power, the TTP has gained considerable strength, securing refuge and operational backing in Afghanistan. Reports suggest that since August 2021, the TTP has carried out more than 124 assaults from its bases across the border, aiming at both Pakistani security personnel and civilians. This revival has resulted in more attempts to infiltrate into Pakistan, making it harder to ensure security along the border (Jones, 2008).

Infiltration routes and cross-border operations

Infiltration paths mainly include rugged landscapes and tribal regions along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, making them hard to oversee and protect. The TTP and various militant factions are known to utilize established smuggling paths and isolated passes to transport personnel and supplies through this rough terrain. The border's porous quality enables

militants to avoid detection, complicating the ability of Pakistani security forces to effectively address these threats. Moreover, there have been cases where militants have targeted military convoys and carried out organized assaults on security outposts, demonstrating their capacity to penetrate Pakistani territory with relative ease.

Global Terrorism and Pakistan reputation

There have been dramatic implications for Pakistan's international standing, particularly its historic connections to extremist groups and its leverage over security issues in its neighbourhood, based on its role in global terrorism. Pakistan has been accused over the years of selective anti- terrorism policy sometimes designating group as "good terrorists" and others "bad terror ists" depending on the utility of such groups for the state. This process has perceived that the Pakistan nurtures and conceives with some militant groups like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Lashkar- e-Taiba (LeT) which have done the attack in Afghanistan and India. Pakistan's inability to squeak properly to these organizations has been a source of ire for the international community especially the United States leading to some military aid being sequestered and heightened scrutiny from groups such as the ends up causing catastrophic diplomatic fallout like FATF. Pakistan was put on the FATF's "grey list" in 2018 because of weak anti money laundering and counter terrorist financing regimes — a move that dented the country's standing in the international community.These reputational issues have intensified since the TTP's re-emergence after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. The TTP has launched a series of attacks from safe havens in Afghanistan, and Pakistan has retaliated, angering the Taliban government and worsening the relationship between the two countries. But with violence climbing, concerns about Pakistan's capacity to arrest its internal security woes and its ability to combat cross-border terrorism have also grown. So one worry is of a double whammy: Not only can it undermine Pakistan's internal order, but it can further alienate a country already driven into the cold with allegations it is providing a safe haven to terrorists. As a result, not only does Pakistan suffer more as an unreliable counter-terrorism ally to the world at large, it goes deeper in undermining its foreign relations with key partners and its economic growth objectives and regional cooperation efforts.

Nuclear security

Nuclear security is a major issue not in Pakistan but the case becomes more major worldwide. As extremism in the country intensifies, so does the threat of an insider threat to Pakistan's nuclear stockpile. This situation is aggravated by the potential for collusion among nuclear sector insiders and extremist groups seeking nuclear weapons or fissile material. Historical events such as Abdul Qadeer Khan's network or the proliferation of nuclear technology to Iran and North Korea highlight vulnerabilities in Pakistan's nuclear security system. On the one hand, radical ideologies among people who have access to sites that house nuclear materials make it possible for "loose nuke" incidents, during which terrorist groups could potentially obtain nuclear materials.

Moreover, the rise in militant attacks on military installations, including the ones associated with Pakistan's nuclear programme, indicates the challenges faced in securing these critical assets. Attacks on sites, including the Wah cantonment, have confirmed that even the most secure places are vulnerable to threats (Gregory, 2009). The risk of the

contrived bodies of militants seizing parts of nuclear weapons or conducting attacks that expose radiological threats is a significant threat to Pakistan, national and regional, and global security. So, amid growing instability, Pakistan needs to make sure that its expanding nuclear capabilities are accompanied by robust security protocols and that these are implemented to deal with insider threats that could lead to catastrophic consequences if militancy were to encroach on its nuclear assets. Given the radicalization of Pakistan both domestically and internationally, such surveillance is a pressing concern as any negative variation would have disastrous and adverse global ramifications necessitating continuous support and lobbying for subsequent counter actions.

Pakistan's Strategies to counter Militancy

National Action Plan 2014

The National Action Plan (NAP) was introduced by the Government of Pakistan in December 2014 as a comprehensive framework to combat terrorism and extremism in the country, especially following the horrific Army Public School attack in Peshawar. It has been done on the basis of a national consensus which included all the political parties, different security agencies and civil society which facilitate all of us to have a common response plan against terrorism in the whole country.

NAP Implementation & Monitoring Framework:

NAP includes multiple Federal Ministries and a Government in the Provinces; thus the Prime Minister has directed the Minister for Interior to formulate & establish a national monitoring mechanism; for implementation of NAP at all levels. NAP, NACTA Assigned Body To Ensure Monitoring The NAP comes under the responsibility of the Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Directorate within NACTA, led by a Director General for CVE, supported by aDirector of NAP and subordinate staff.

Key Objectives and Components

The NAP includes 20 actionable points aimed at tackling different aspects of terrorism and extremism. These points cover a range of issues, including:

- Implementation of the death penalty for those found guilty of terrorism-related crimes.
- Establishment of special trial courts under the supervision of the military, with an operational period of two years.
- Banning the operations of militant groups and armed groups within the country.
- Strengthening the capabilities of the National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA).
- Taking strict measures against publications that promote hatred, extremism, sectarianism and intolerance.
- Cutting off the sources of funding for terrorists and terrorist organizations.
- Preventing the resurgence of banned organizations.
- Formation and deployment of a special counter-terrorism unit.
- Implementation of effective measures to combat religious persecution.
- Regulating and registering religious seminaries.
- Banning the glorification of terrorists and their organizations in print and electronic media.
- Initiate administrative and development reforms in FATA, focusing on the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- Completely dismantle communication networks used by terrorists.
- Take action against misuse of the internet and social media for terrorist activities.
- Implement a zero-tolerance policy against militancy in Punjab.

- Continue the operation in Karachi until its objectives are fully achieved.
- Empower the Baluchistan government to lead political reconciliation with the full support of all stakeholders.
- Firmly address sectarian terrorism.
- Develop a comprehensive policy to manage the situation of Afghan refugees, starting with their registration.
- Overhaul and reform the criminal justice system (NACTA, 2020).

Operation Zarb-e-Azb

Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014) was a large military operation launched by the Pakistan Armed Forces on 15 June 2014 against various militant groups in North Waziristan, primarily directed towards eliminating the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and foreign terrorist organizations. The operation was seen as a major blow against terrorism and a shift from the Pakistani military strategy of seeking, destroying, clearing and holding territory once held by militants.The operation ran from May 2007 to August 2008 and involved roughly 180,000 troops in a series of phases aimed at breaking up terrorist networks and re-establishing government control of the region. The already-known hybrid doctrine of "Seek, Destroy, Clear, Hold" from earlier engagements was a framework adapted for this operation in five stages: location and destruction of the target followed by clearing of threats and moving from destruction towards territory holding to ensure rehabilitation after the operations.

Operation Zarb-e-Azb was a game-changer for Pakistan in its scuffle against terrorism as it was a measured approach to emerging insurgency with notable gains in terms of security and stability in the area concerned. But it also exposed the complexity of having military goals in the context of the social and economic structures that are intimately linked to these, often military interventions.

Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad

Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017), launched on February 22, 2017, is an ongoing military operation led by the Pakistan Army against the terrorists all over the country to consolidate the gains of previous operations, especially Operation Zarb-e-Azb. The key motivation behind Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad was contain residual threats, consolidate gains, borders, and IBOs.

It is also pertinent to mention that Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad was initiated to take stock of the situation in a broader manner with the scope of the operations involving all branches of the armed forces, including the Army, Air Force, Navy, and local law-enforcement agencies. By 2021, there have been roughly 375,000 intelligence-led operations, with significant arrests made and weapons caches seized.

The operation has helped keep hundreds of terrorist plots at bay and made attacks less frequent across the country. More than 7,000 militants were said to have been killed, along with thousands of members of the security forces and civilians. It has also helped restore state authority in volatile areas like Punjab, where law enforcement was trained and resourced to restore order" (Elahi, & Javaid 2020).

Conclusion

Pakistan faces a significant threat from non-state actors, particularly militant groups, due to its complex historical, social, and geopolitical realities. The 1980s Afghan jihad turned Pakistan into a battleground of armed groups, fanatic ideology and a stockpile of weapons. Governance problems, lack of law enforcement and political instability had

created an enabling environment for militancy. An ideological battle, religious and sectarian fissures, and geopolitical factors have rent Pakistan's social fabric, fostering mistrust and violence among disparate groups. Pakistan is one of those countries where the socio-economic situation, such as unemployment or lack of education, has further increased the spread of militancy.

The state of Pakistan has long faced challenges due to its strategic use of militant groups, especially in Afghanistan and Kashmir. This strategic blunder has brought millions to displacement, thousands to death, and continents to blockade. Militancy has also affected Pakistan's relations with its neighbors and the world, with accusations flies of militant groups and safe havens inside Pakistan. Pakistan has launched military operations against militants and also conducted intelligence-based operations to target them. The national action plan (NAP) includes important components for fighting extremism and counter-terrorism, highlighting that a multi-pronged strategy is necessary.

Recommendations

Alternative Narratives: Use the old and documentary projects to tell peace stories and motivate non-military people

National Counter-Radicalization Campaign: Emphasize success in rehabilitation from militancy.

Strategies for Direct Intervention: Establish youth empowerment initiatives across sports, arts, and technology.

Vocational Training Centers: Establish centers in high-risk areas to provide vocational skills training and job opportunities.

Psychosocial Support: Implementation of trauma and other psychological programs related to violence and conflicts.

Women Empowerment: Educate and employ to create resilience amongst the communities.

Community Policing: Encourage crime prevention action for the community and the police.

Shift in Culture: Restructure the academic content to foster tolerance and acceptance of differing viewpoints.

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