



RESEARCH PAPER

Terrorism in Pakistan: A Non-Traditional Security Threat in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to understand the challenges that terrorism poses to Pakistan's security, governance, and socio-economic development. Terrorism is becoming one of the paramount's Non-Traditional Security threats in Pakistan with special reference to 21st century that threatens the social, political & economic fabrics of the society. While traditional security threats are associated with interstate conflicts, terrorism derives from transnational ideas, political disorder within a country, and social and economic inequality within the national society. The Pakistanis, furthermore, national strategic placement and the country's involvement in earlier global conflicts like the Afghanistan war has increase it seismic vulnerability. This has led to emergence of extreme groups, a tradition of sectarian violence and continued exploitation of open borders, putting into question the issue of security leading to a cycle of insecurity. This paper aims to identify the social, economic and political consequences of terrorism on the future of Pakistani Nation and its growth. They underpin the efforts the state has been making in its fight against terrorism using military force, legal frameworks and social-economic measures and more importantly focuses on the challenges of the implementation of policies. The study also points to the fact that there is a need for effective coordination between counter terrorism and development initiatives in order to deal with causes of conflict including poverty, illiteracy and bad governance. Besides, the study puts more emphasis on regional cooperation, as well as international cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Thus, this qualitative study is useful in the understanding of how non-traditional security threats transform the indicators of both national and regional security in the twenty first century.

Keywords: Extremism, Governance, Non-Traditional Security, Pakistan, Sectarian Violence, Terrorism

Introduction

The traditional and non-traditional security in Pakistan has changed dramatically in the twenty-first century, and among the non-traditional threats, terrorism stands in front row. Since the September 11 attacks, Pakistan has been in the middle of global and regional power play and Terrorism, internal and external, become an issue of concern for Pakistan's security. All aspects of the state and civil society, including military, governmental, economic, social, and cultural, are affected by terrorism. It has occurred due to the participation in War on Terror, connection with the militants, and have also facilitated emergence of new internal threats. This phenomenon is not only reserved for him nationally, but for regional stability in the South Asian region, the Islamic world, and international structures for security (Rashid, Jamil, & Minhas, 2023).

Terrorism has taken a diverse dimension in Pakistan; while recent attacks on government buildings and military barracks; suicide bombing; violence against the Shia

community and operation against neighboring country's territory. Out of all these factors, internal political instability, religious extremism and unresolved disputes over the state of Kashmir has been found to play a central role in this rise of terrorism. In addition, having neighbors like Afghanistan which borders with Pakistan has raised the security challenge more because these insurgent groups freely move within the Pakistan borders. As the armed forces of Pakistan are involved in counterterrorism, social-political impacts of such violent incidents are quickly resonated throughout the Pakistani society. This violence detaches the common knowledge of safety, has negatively impacted the economy, forced displacement and resulted in a political crisis that weakened trust in the state. Thus, threats evolving in the security context of Pakistan call for reconsidering conventional security concepts and stressing further recognition and analysis of non-traditional security threats not evaluated before (Syed & Javed, 2017).

In addition, the post 9/11 global war on terrorism has sharply impacted Pakistan's strategic policies, which sometimes entail a web of internal contradictions. On the one hand Pakistan has been a frontline state assisting the United States and other western countries in war against terrorism; on the other hand, it has been using certain militants as proxies against its rivals thus compromising its counter-terrorism efforts at home (Nawab, et. al, 2021). This paradox of engagement and containment makes the counterterrorism challenges and impacts on the nation's international relation complex. In recent years, the comeback of old militant groups including Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), emergence of new groups like ISIS Khorasan has added another layer of security threats to Pakistani state. Concerns regarding radicalization of youth, use of social media to spread extremism ideology, cross border activities of militant organizations make terrorism as a continued non-traditional security threat against which Pakistan has to build its strong defense to prevent future instabilities (Shahab, 2022).

The ethnic, political and sectarian differences found in Pakistan are one of the most influential reasons that make terrorism a continuously increasing threat for the country. Thus, terrorism in Pakistan has long been reflected as a phenomenon caused by religious fanaticism but it is much deeper than that. The relationship of terrorism with other socio-political issues like poverty, unemployment and incapacitation of some section of the population in the minds of leaders from making meaningful contributions to the society has given rise to "recruitment" of youths in this terrorist network. Over the years, TTP and other sectarian groups that exist and are based in Pakistan, have been known to use these socio-economic and political inequalities to broker their attacks. Combining terrorism with internal political and social struggles, it is impossible to counter the security threat resulting from terrorism only with military means. It needs both the action plan oriented towards combating terrorism with the use of military, police, intelligence and other special means, and the action plan aimed at cessation of extremism's feeders, such as economic development, social integration, and political reintegration (Srikanth, 2014).

To counter these emerging threats, the following counterterrorism measures have been formulated and implemented with the direction of Pakistani government: Military operations, intelligence sharing with abroad partners and introducing/ training CTD of police and military. The recent major military operation was Operation Zarb-e-Azb so initiated in 2014 whose objective was to clear North Waziristan of terrorist facilities. Despite its impact of softening the intensity of the terrorist groups and the frequency of attacks it exposed the fact that the threat posed by militants is long term and not easily eliminated even with large scale operations against established militant formations. However, this change of focus has frequently occasioned rising worrying incidences of violation of human rights among individuals detained under terrorism charges and more often than not harm to innocent citizens during counter insurgency operations. The conditions in areas like North and South Waziristan still remain tense and thus despite the

efforts of military, there is still the tendency of terrorist threats to security in Pakistan is still high (Zaman, 2020).

Literature Review

"COVID-19: a challenge or opportunity for terrorist groups?" by Abdul Basit, *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 2020. Analyzing how this pandemic has affected terrorist organizations, including those in Pakistan is the focus of this article. Basit examines the role of the pandemic as an enabler or otherwise of terrorist activities by an evaluation of its impact on resource mobilization, recruitment, and propaganda (Basit, 2020).

" Growing Chinese Presence in the Indian Ocean: Prospects and Challenges " by Khalid Manzoor Butt and Syed Jaffar Ahmed Siddiqui, *Strategic Studies*, 2021. focuses on the growing Chinese power in the Southern Indian Ocean and potential consequent ramifications. The paper tries to deepen the understanding of what strategic partnerships are, what type they are, and what kind of enterprises they include, discussing the chosen topic based on the examination of initiative, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The paper focuses on regional actors' reaction including India and the United States to Pax-Sinica that shaping the security dynamics for Pakistan (Butt, 2022).

"Promoting extreme violence: visual and narrative analysis of select ultraviolet terror propaganda videos produced by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2015 and 2016" by Venkatesh V., Podoshen J.S., Wallin J., Rabah J., and Glass D., *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2020. The paper "Visualization and Storytelling of ISIS 2015 and 2016 Ultraviolet Terror Propaganda Videos" by Venkatesh et al. the authors analyze the way in which visuals and narrative are employed concurrently in ISIS propaganda videos. The authors examine symbolic, emotional/ideological content of these videos and the ways they are built to create fear, celebrate violence, and appeal for recruitment. In the study, the authors analyze connections between ultraviolet imagery and narratives related to the dissemination of radical narratives and sustaining the group. In disassembling these media tactics, the article enriches a scholarship on how and why such groups maintain and perpetuate their networks in digital media environments (Venkatesh et al., 2018).

"Jirga system and its role in peacebuilding and development in Pakistan's terrorism-affected Pashtun 'tribal' districts" by Jan Alam, *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 2021. The article "Jirga System and Its Role in Peace building and Development in Pakistan's Terrorism affected Pashtun's 'Tribal' Districts": Jan Alam where the author talks about the role and working of the Jirga system. Alam explains how this indigenous system has helped towards restoration of peace and trust among communities badly hit by terrorism. The role of the Jirga is considered from the perspective of dispute solving at the local level, social integration, and development. The article therefore postulates that through blending the traditional practices with the state institutions the Jirga system provides a culturally appropriate response to the terrorism menace and a long-term solution to the conflict-ridden regions (Alam, 2021).

"Emerging Trends of On-campus Radicalization in Pakistan" by Khuram Iqbal and Zainab Mehmood, *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism*, 2021. This paper discusses a rise in radicalization among university students in Pakistan, a subject that should bother policymakers and university management. This paper's authors explore the structural, ideological, and socio-economic factors that may lead vulnerable youth in educational institutions to become vulnerable to radical ideas (Iqbal & Mehmood, 2021).

Material and Methods

The study uses a qualitative research method in investigating terrorism as a nontraditional security threat in Pakistan in the 21st Century. Secondary data has been sourced from peer reviewed articles, media databases, library sources, newspaper and social media. Methodologically, a thematic analysis is used to develop patterns, trends and narratives about terrorism and its influence on security in Pakistan. An analysis of data from the past and present is also done in order to ensure that data collected and analyzed fits in the socio-political and economic structures. The basic ethical considerations include accuracy so that the information being presented is correct and proved from other sources.

Historical Context of Terrorism in Pakistan

Terrorism in Pakistan has always had a long-hidden history anchored on geopolitical and social issues. While in the 1980s the focus of turmoil in Pakistan was a direct result of the Soviet Afghan War. It remained a frontline state; its intelligence agencies cooperating directly with the United States and Saudi Arabia to bolster Afghan Mujahideen. This period influenced the arrival of weapons and militants together with extreme ideologies, some of which were later used in the internal and regional strife. The Soviet pull out provided an opportunity, which most of the fighters transitioned to fight for other reasons thereby creating future problems (Romaniuk, 2020).

During the 1990s, sectarian violence rose in Pakistan and increased with the help of foreign funds for extremists. They targeted religious minorities and rivals who benefited from the internal conflict. On the same note, the escalating acts of militancy in Indian Administered-Kashmir put a lot of pressure on the security factors. Pakistan's support for the jihadis in Kashmir provoked the intense global opposition and facilitated the growth of non-state actors' activity in the territory of Pakistan. These groups worked independently and with relative immunity challenging the power of the state and exacerbating the social cleavages.

The incident of September 11, 2001 was remarkable as a new era in introducing innovation in the society. Pakistan supported the war against terrorism by endorsing the War on Terror launched by the United States. But this decision had its implication because it set off a number of issues the country had to cope with. The incursion of military action in the said tribal zones and primarily in FATA invited retaliatory reactions from militants resulting to improved rates of domestic terrorism. The emergence of Tehrik Taliban in Pakistan and other factions was a direct confrontation with the state leading to the attacks on civil and military targets, as well as on innocent people and key installations under construction (Khan et al., 2021).

Over the past few years, efforts have been taken towards the eradication of terrorism through operations like Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad through which militant organizations have suffered major blows. But sources of terrorism lie very much at large. The reasons for terrorism are easier and better things such as poverty, illiteracy, and political instability. The influence from the neighboring country, Afghanistan, increases the circulation of such problem. Despite this Pakistan has recorded some successes, it is nevertheless important to note that combating terrorism cannot permanently be a short-term strategy but must inter alia seek to address the socio-economic grievances and encourage regional partnership instead of rivalry for a long-lasting solution to the threat of terrorism (Ejaz et al., 2023).

Terrorism In Pakistan

Separatist Movements and Insurgency

Historical Context of Separatist Movements

Balochistan

Insurgency and separatist movements were started in Pakistan after independence; these movements demanded independence, a greater level of autonomy, and against the government. Insurgency in Baluchistan was started in 1948, right after its integration with Pakistan. When Pakistan was independent from India in 1947, Baluchistan was a princely state with considerable autonomy in political and economic affairs.

Ethnic conflicts

The ethnic conflicts in Pakistan have contributed much to the incidence of terrorism and 'state instability' in the country. These issues, arising from past humiliations, political exclusion, unequal livelihood opportunities and demography, identity crisis, and conflict of interest, have emerged with ethnic militias.

Causes of Separatist Moments

Balochi people and some of their political leaders demand their full access to their resources. Baluchistan is rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, and minerals, but still is an underdeveloped province (Muzaffar, 2018). It has also strategic importance because of Gwadar. Baluchistan people think that they have not been given educational, political, and economic rights. Terrorism and extremism increased in Baluchistan after the Nawab Akbar Bugti murder by the Pakistani army. Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), a separatist organization, launched a series of attacks on 26 August 2024. People from Punjab were the targets, including drivers.

Political repression has been the most brutal in Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the now former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). These are areas that have historical political injustices of being left out politically, economically oppressed and economically developing (Khan M. , 2017).

External support

Pakistan has for long accused India of supporting insurgent groups in its territory with RAW as the main alleged culprit. Of the many examples, the latest and most prominent of such an accusation is the arrest of Indian national Kulbhushan Jadhav in March 2016 in Baluchistan. Pakistan accuses that Jadhav was a RAW officer, involved in spying and using local militants such as BLA to cause insecurity in the region. As per the Pakistani allegation, Jadhav provided support in financing terrorism, plotting and carrying out attacks on infrastructure and sowing political instability. India on the other hand has insisted that Jadhav was a civilian kidnapped from Iran while denying state-sponsored terrorism in Pakistan. This case still continues to be a root cause of India-Pakistan diplomacy and conflict leading to mistrust (Noraiee, 2020).

With the events expressing organizations such as the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) involving Pakistan in its interventions. It alleges these groups planning and mobilizing to carry out terrorist activities within Pakistan from Afghanistan territory taking advantage of the border area's geographic characteristic and lack of effective administration in the border areas of Afghanistan. Pakistan says these groups have had the 'tacit or active support of successive Afghan governments, as well as foreign intelligence agencies. The problem was last witnessed at the Afghanistan war where insurgents in Pakistan used Afghanistan as a transit point to carry out operations. The Pakistani government has called upon the Afghan government and the international community to counter this cross-border terrorism and there acts of BLA practicing in

Afghanistan getting support from the Afghan soil. Since the resurgence of the Taliban in 2021 Afghan based faction continues to pose threat to Pakistan and cross border IED blasts causing insurgency is still a serious issue.

Terrorist attacks in Pakistan

Pakistan has endured unrelenting rebellion, and secession demands primarily in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which used to be the tribal region. In Baluchistan, political groups such as Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) or the Baluch Republican Army (BRA) demanded Baluch independence, concentrating on the following grievances – The Baluch people’s non-representation and the exploitation of the country’s natural resources. They commonly attack state buildings, structures as well as infrastructure development projects including CPEC. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, or Pakistan Taliban, has an insurgency, with purpose of attacking the government to establish sharia law, and they have crossed border attacks from Afghanistan. Targeted killings, bombings and attacks on security forces exist in both regions which include the 2019 Gwadar Pearl Continental attack by the BLA and cross-border IED blasts linked to the TTP. These movements shed light on some fundamental question related to governance, distribution of resources and ethnic grouping which are threatening to the stability of Pakistan (Muhammad & Kazi, 2018).

Militants attacked Pearl Continental Hotel in Gwadar on May 11, 2019

The Pearl Continental Hotel attack in Gwadar was one of the high-profile terrorist acts, conducted by Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) against the China operatives involved in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and against Pakistan manned key infrastructural assets. CPEC’s focal city of Gwadar has been a center of separatist organizations claiming that resources and infrastructure of Baluchistan are exploited.

Chaman Border Bombing

The Chaman Border bombing in was on March 2023 where the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan at Chaman border crossing in Baluchistan which is a major trading route. A blast took place near a security booth and at least nine people were killed and more than 30 others, including civilians and security forces personnel, injured. The attack was carried out in a crowded region leaving people running for cover disrupting business, trade and travel between countries. Although no organization came forward to take on the responsibility, the attack is said to read the hand of TTP and or Baluchi separatists known to have plans to attack security forces and installations in the area. The bombing also brought at focus the precarious security along the Durand Line: dangers rooted from the cross-border insurgents’ activities and the general insecurity in Baluchistan province.

August 2024 Assault

Militant activities in Baluchistan increased sharply in August this year in particular targeting on 25 and 26 August which reflects the intensity. BLA was responsible for some of such attacks including assaults on civilian lorry drivers and personnel from the military and the police in Baluchistan province. These events led to the death of not less than 74 individuals most of whom were noncombatants and several captives.

One of the worst massacres took place near Musa Khail when the militants stopped cars, demanded to sight people and killed 23 persons from Punjabi origin. At the same time, attacks on police, railway, and highway facilities increased by coordinated action. Security forces countered with operations that they said have eliminated 21 insurgents.

These attacks happened when the eighteen years were completed of Nawab Akbar Bugti, a former nationalist leader that means that the terrorists wanted to enhance the effect of their operation by choosing this kind of symbolic time. The activities of the BLA only indicate continued problems of separatist insurgencies in Baluchistan arising from age-old issues to do with resource sharing, political independence, and ethnic discrimination.

Cross-Border Terrorism and Spillover from Afghanistan

Historical Context

Cross-border terrorism from Afghanistan into Pakistan has always been challenging and affects our security, territorial integrity, economy, and regional stability. Durand Line was the major issue between the states. Afghanistan doesn't consider Durand Line as an international border; in 1893, the boundary was drawn by the British between Afghanistan and British India.

The problem of cross-border terrorism between Afghanistan and Pakistan mainly started since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In the 1980s Pakistan emerged as an important sponsoring power of Afghan mujahideen in their confrontation with the Soviet troops. Due to Pakistan's unconditional support of the USA against the war on terror, Pakistan faced the consequences. Which sparked radicalization and fanaticism in Pakistan. Finally Soviet left Afghanistan in 1989 but soon after Afghanistan was plunged into a civil war; this ushered in the Taliban who captured majority rule in Afghanistan by mid 1990s.

After the overthrow of the ruling Taliban by the U.S-led forces in 2001, most of the Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters escaped across the open frontier into Pakistan's tribal areas and resumed their fight. This coordinated process gave a long-term security problem to Pakistan particularly in FATA and latter in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and another extremist organization spread terror in Pakistan. These terrorist organizations target innocents and civilians, like the APS attack in 2014, the 2017 Parachinar Market attack, and the Bacha Khan University attack in 2016. The Afghan border is also used for smuggling, which affects our sovereignty and global image (Bahar, 2020).

Cross-Border Terrorism and Spillover

Cross border terrorism is the phenomenon whereby militant organizations launch themselves from one country into another with the intention of carrying out acts of terror. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the primary terrorist groups included the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) who have used the border areas for sanctuary hide outs and training.

Haqqani Network Attacks in Pakistan.

Haqqani Network is one of the groups linked with Afghan Taliban which has claimed responsibility of many attacks in Pakistan especially in the areas of Afghan - Pakistan border. They have been known to be involved in cross-border activities, in many of the Pakistan's attack origin from Afghanistan.

January 13, 2015, Attack on a Pakistani Border Checkpoint in North Waziristan

The attack struck at a Pakistani military position in the tribal area of North Waziristan, an area notorious for its influence by militants. Militants fired an organized attack with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). The attack was one in a series by the militant groups in retaliation for Pakistan's recent upping of security operations in the region.

October 10, 2011 Militant attack on Pakistan's military headquarters in Rawalpindi

Suspected supporters of the Haqqani Network assaulted a Pakistani military facility in Rawalpindi, close to the capital Islamabad. The assault was comprised of bombings and a shooting out between the terrorists and Pakistani security forces. In the attack, several of the Pakistani soldiers were killed and many others were injured.

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) attacks in Pakistan

December 21, 2024

An attack on a military checkpoint in South Waziristan conducted by TTP on December 21, 2024, led to the destruction of 16 soldiers of Pakistan besides the eight soldiers got injured. The militants used all manner of guns and ammunition during the attack, including light and heavy weapons.

In return the operation that was performed by the TTP on 21 December 2024, Pakistan Air force conducted aerial bombings of TTP nests in Afghanistan's Paktika province. These strikes are said to have put paid to several militant camps (Hussain & Ahmad, 2021).

Peshawar School Massacre

The Peshawar School Massacre of 2014 had been one of the most dreadful happening in Pakistan. On December 16, 2014, at about 10:15 AM six fully equipped TTP attackers entered the army's Public School in Peshawar and shot dead at students and staff of the school. The militants were armed and dressed in military fatigues and launched the attack at the school in what is believed to have been several hours' rampage. Since they mainly aimed at shocking the public to further the psychological effect, they killed 141 people: 132 pupils and students aged between 8 and 18. Teachers and staff members were also among them. The attack was expected as a reaction to military operations in North Waziristan and Khyber Agency. Massacre caused nationalist and international condemnations: (i) Pakistan approved a National Action Plan for Terrorism, and (ii) removed a ban on executing terrorists. This tragedy still plays a central somber theme in the country's history as a result of the effects of terrorism (Musharraf et al., 2022).

Cyber-Terrorism

In the current century, the issue of cybersecurity has become apparent and especially in South Asia between India and Pakistan. It is also important to understand that both nations have become targets of cyber warfare that increase tensions, and, in some cases, that may be connected to terrorism. It is called these cyber incidents patriotism hackers, which perform hacking activities with the approval of their governments, thus complicating the relationship between cyber activities and terrorism.

Operation Hangover (2013)

Hangover was a big and advanced cyber-attack operation which was carried out by Indian hackers against the Pakistani consistencies of defense and diplomacy. The campaign also purposefully tried to get into many strategic networks with the objective of gathering lots of classified data concerning military and intelligence activities. Sustained malware attack was done on the Pakistani government networks for taking over the data control and data theft.

Bare exposure of this operation has led to the development of much of the lack of trust in Pakistan with officials accusing India of cyber warfare aimed at derailing the

country. This distrust was taken to the next level by the extreme faction who exploited the narrative of an India “existential threat” to mobilize people to extremism. Such groups painted cyberattacks as the Indian animosity toward Pakistan and justified the attacks against Indians and their properties. This type of operation shows that the state-supported cyber activities can have undesirable effects that lead to the increase in the support of extreme positions and contribute in their turn to terrorism.

Banking Sector Attacks (2018)

The Indian hackers shut down Pakistan’s banking operations and impacted the confidence of the consumers. Due to the aforementioned negative effects on the Cambodian economy, extremists capitalized on such factors as instability and uncertainty to increase anti-India feeling and fully justify their actions further illustrating the connection between cyber warfare and terrorism.

Analyzing the Effects of Pulwama Attack or the Digital Consequences (2019)

Indian paramilitary forces were targeted in a suicide bombing in Pulwama in February 2019 and there was increase in tensions between the two countries over these years. In the wake, cyberspace was turned into a theatre for patriotic hacking groups on the two sides. In response, Indian hackers attacked Pakistani government sites and placed messages and logos on their home pages accusing Pakistan of supporting terrorism. For example, several governments of Pakistan websites, including www.mofa.gov.pk and www.pakrail.gov.pk were temporarily knocked out.

Consequently, Pakistani hacker groups started to launch counter-operations on Indian targets. They targeted banking websites and the minor electricity distribution networks, causing disservices. These attacks were used by both sides to put the blame on the other for nurturing terrorism. The case demonstrated how one aspect of warfare like cyberwarfare serves to deepen a countries conflict by creating an environment that allows terror groups to actively mobilize individuals for their cause. About this event, it might be influential to realize that Servers’ connection with physical attacks in this event depict the creeping adoption of technology into conflicts.

Banking Sector Attacks and Infrastructure Disruption (2018)

Pakistani hackers similarly launched simultaneous cyber raids on twenty Indian banks and financial organizations in 2018, following a number of previous Indian hacking attacks on Pakistani targets, according to Pakistani sources. Such attacks were intended to breach delicate financial information, incapacitate operations, and undermine the public confidence of the Indian banks. Major targets involved had been the payment gateways and servers of Indian private banks that led to temporary disruptions of these host services.

The cut is economically staggering, and there has been some information of users’ data leaked in the dark network circulating in the internet. These operations were used by Pakistani hacker groups to expose the indents in the Indian cyber security, presenting themselves as the protector against the alleged Indian aggression. The story was used by the Pakistani militant organizations in an attempt to spread violence, relating the cyber-attacks to the rest of the operation against India perceived hegemonic powers which dominated the region.

Pakistan’s Response and Strategies to Indian Cyberattacks:

Due to numerous cyber incidents originating from India, Pakistan has developed a complex approach to improve the strength of its cyber defense element and to respond when provoked. One of the important constituents of this strategy has been the creation of

designated cyber-warfare directorate within the Pakistan Armed Forces and intelligence services. These units are meant to deal with Indian cyber spying, protect the country's most important infrastructure, and strike back. The Pakistan Cyber Army (PCA), although not strictly an organized body but well-known patriotic hackers' group, has again and again initiated an attack on Indian government domains and organizations to show Pakistan's supremacy in cyberspace.

The National Cyber Security Policy (2021) has been formulated in Pakistan in order to protect the country's critical information infrastructure and creating a secure cyberspace. The policy aims at scaling up national cyber defense programs such as establishing cyber defense units, improving technical competence levels and increasing partnership between government and the private sector. It is headed for the preservation of sensitive data, the deployment of more reliable technologies and computer systems, as well as for the general cooperation for the counteraction of the new generation of threats in the sphere of cybernetics. Explicitly, awareness, training, and regulation initiatives as the key areas for improvement are aimed at increasing the general cyber protection level in Pakistan.

Religious Intolerance and Sectarian Violence

This has well been demonstrated by religious intolerance compounded by the targeting of minorities in Pakistan that have promoted terrorism. This is based on historical, political, social and ideological antecedents that foster extremism and have compounded the crises of political stability in the country.

Because of different religious groups in Islam like Sunni, Shia, Deobandi, Wahabi, and other religious minorities like Hindu, Christian, and Ahmadis, Pakistan is facing religious extremism in the form of these groups. People, to gain their benefits socially, economically, and politically, use religious ideologies to spread violence. Different political parties also exploit religious sentiments to gain their benefits, in an election campaign, or to suppress opposition. These threats create internal instability, mistrust, and alienation among groups. (Hussain et al., 2023)

Pakistan has experienced major incidents of intolerance and oppression of religious minorities; however, constitution allows equal rights to all. Many religious minorities are threatened and discriminated: they are Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Ahmadis, and Shia Muslims.

After the 1980s Soviet Afghan war, religious extremism and violence spread across Pakistan. Pakistan acted as a front line and trained Afghan mujahideen in Pakistan with the help of the USA and Saudi Arabia. The war contributed to the rise of religious fanaticism, sectarian violence, and radicalization in Pakistan. Madrassas (religious schools) funded by the USA and Saudi Arabia against the Soviet invasion became ground for jihadist ideologies in Pakistan, which also created religious fanaticism among the youth. Saudi Arabia supported (Sunni Muslims) and Iran supported (Shia Muslims) sparked sectarian conflict. (Zaidi et al., 2024)

Historical Context and Sectarian Divisions

This split between Sunni and Shia has been long-standing but in Pakistan it becomes profound in the 1980s because of regional as well as international reasons.

Iranian Revolution (1979)

Over the past four decades, the Middle East has witnessed the Iranian Revolution (1979) which completely changed the region and had repercussions for sectarian relations in Pakistan. It produced the Islamic revolution in Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah

Ruhollah Khomeini who sought to spread the revolution to all the Shia world. This raised lots of tension with Saudi Arabia; a Sunni dominate country which supports Wahhabi Islam religion. Their rivalry strengthened sectarian conflict around the world and in Pakistan particularly where both sides saw an opportunity for proxy warfare. Here's how this rivalry influenced sectarian militancy in Pakistan (Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020):

Iran offered both financial support and also religious scholarships and training to Pakistani organizations, including the Tehrik-e-Jafaria Pakistan (TJP), a community that campaigned for Shia rights.

Due to Iran's influence, Saudi Arabia doubled its support to Sunni groups in Pakistan through the construction of more and more madrassas, mosques and charities spread Wahabi Islam in the country. Some of most actively anti-Shia groups, including Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and its offshoot Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) benefitted from Saudi funds received through various conduits.

Soviet Afghan War

In the period between the 1979-1989, Soviet Afghan War Pakistan had been most important in being a theater of operations for the United States and Saudi Arabia against the Soviet Union. It was during this time that armed groups began to form and grow stronger; many went on to shift their fight towards fellow Pakistanis which resulted in sectarian conflict and long-term insurgency in Pakistan.

Saudi Arabia; gave money to Sunni guerrilla fighters to challenge the Soviets and their Afghan allies. This funding very often exaggerated the Wahhabi trends.

United States: Using operation Cyclone, CIA provided billions of dollars for training and arming mujahideen fighters against Soviet's invasion in Afghanistan.

After Soviets left Afghanistan, they disengaged and so did America and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan was left with huge militant groups that needed to be demobilized but there was no plan on how to do it.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), and Tehrik-I-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and different groups have spread violence and extremism; these extremist organizations with foreign founding inspired youth. These were all Sunni-based organizations that started bombing against the Shia community in Pakistan. Like APS attack 2014, 2013 Hazara Shia attack.

2010 Lahore Data Darbar Attack: On July 1, 2010, three suicide bombers attacked Data Darbar, a religious place in Pakistan. The attacker targeted worshippers who were practicing spiritual practices, including prayers, recitations, and rituals. In this attack, 42 people were killed and 172 were injured. This attack was widely condemned in Pakistan and on a global level. Shufi shrines are generally regarded as a place of peace and spiritual peace.

In 2013, a wave of deadly bombings began to be carried out on the Hazara Shia Muslim community, in Quetta, Baluchistan, Pakistan. These attacks were a part of sectarian violence that the innocent and marginalized Hazara community has been experiencing for decades. Where 180 people were killed and more than 380 were injured. The attack was launched in market; it was one of the deadliest attacks in Quetta. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a Sunni extremist group, took responsibility for the attack.

Parachinar, which is the capital of Kurram District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has long been in the center of sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shias. In 2017,

Parachinar Market (a vegetable market) in KPK, where a Shia Muslim community was blasted, over 70 people were killed and more than 100 were injured. TTP took responsibility for the attack.(Basit, 2023). Recently Some armed men attacked a convoy of vehicles that was heading from Parachinar to Peshawar on November 21, 2024. The gunmen began shooting randomly and killed at least 42 people, six of them women, while 20 others were wounded.

The Jaranwala event of 16 August 2023 in Faisalabad District of Pakistan was quite disturbing event to which social tensions and minorities' insecurity. It is argued that provocation for violent turbulence was likely to be caused by blasphemy against a Christian person. This resulted to burning of 21 churches and over 100 houses of the Christian citizens of Pakistan. (Abbas et al., 2021)

Military campaigns were also started to eliminate these extremist groups, Zarb-e-Azb (2014) and Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017). Pakistan also introduced the National Action Plan (NAP) in 2014 after the APS attack to eliminate terrorism and counter extremism and sectarianism (Tobin, 2022).

Conclusion

In the current millennium, terrorism has become one of the most significant non-conventional threats to Pakistan's security that altered structural and functional realities of internal and external security. In contrast, conventional threats are mostly defined state and military based, while terrorism seeks to dismantle the social order that evokes pervasive fear, uncertainty and economic consequences. It manipulates religious, ethnic, and politics conflicts; it is sowing seeds of anarchy in different regions and democracy. Terrorism has remained an unceasing phenomenon in Pakistan and apart from causing the numerous deaths, it has eroded public confidence in state organizations. Due to persistent counterterrorism measures, terrorism remains a growing menace in the country because of its dynamics in form of decentralized networks and ideologies linked globally. In contrast to traditional threats that can be mitigated through military might, fighting terrorism also comes with a multi-dimensional solution. Effective and responsive governance systems, society economic and political emancipation and imparting knowledge on resurgence of extremist goals form part of a sustainable process that leads to lasting peace. Another important reason is that international support is also relevant because terrorism does not confine itself to a single country but requires a coordinated effort at the end of the member states of each country. Combating terrorism in Pakistan is an important challenge for its political stability and efforts to build effective security in the given environment. Only then may Pakistan erase this heavy threat from its horizon, while building the basis for a safer and harmonious further existence.

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