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The Resurgence of the TTP in Pakistan

A Comparative Study with the Afghanistan Taliban

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About the Author

Mustafa Modasser holds Master's degree in International Relations, specializing in the study of Islamic extremist groups. With nearly a decade of experience, his focus has been on analyzing Islamic groups, particularly those in South Asia, including the Afghanistan Taliban and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. Previously, he served as a Senior Research Assistant at the Center for Strategic Studies within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan for over a year. Following that, he worked as a Strategic Communication Consultant for the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan, while also teaching South Asian studies at the university level.

Since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, he has been actively involved in analyzing and contributing to Persian-language media outlets such as Afghanistan International, BBC Farsi, and Hasht-e Subh Daily. His commitment to understanding and addressing the complexities of Islamic extremism remains steadfast, as he continues to contribute valuable insights and research in this vital area of study.

Introduction

This research presents a case study on the resurgence of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in a comparative analysis with the Afghanistan Taliban. Founded in 2007 as an umbrella movement in Pakistan's tribal territory with the aim of implementing Sharia law and promoting their interpretation of Islam, the TTP has since engaged in numerous terrorist and suicide attacks in Pakistan. Over the years, the group has experienced significant fluctuations in its activities, with multiple leaders being eliminated through U.S. drone strikes and Pakistani military operations. Despite intensive military operations and attacks against it from 2014 through 2017, the TTP has demonstrated resilience by successfully redefining itself and sustaining its activities.

This study focuses on examining the TTP's objectives, operational areas, financial resources, and military capacity. A key aspect is the relationship between the TTP and the Afghanistan Taliban, exploring their cooperation and mutual support, particularly in border and tribal regions. Additionally, the study investigates how the rise of the Afghanistan Taliban has positively impacted the TTP, transforming it into a formidable force causing substantial casualties in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas. The escalating power of the TTP indicates that it is now a challenge beyond Pakistan's capacity to manage independently. It poses a substantial threat to South Asia, with implications for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

The study provides crucial insights into the growing threat of the TTP and its complex dynamics with the Afghanistan Taliban. Understanding the TTP is essential for navigating the evolving threat landscape in the region. This study aims to equip policymakers, think tanks, and research institutions with an in-depth analysis of the TTP's developing capabilities and strategic impact, enabling a more informed and effective response to the escalating threat posed by the TTP.

TTP's increased operational dynamism and strategic attacks, alongside the surging insecurity in Pakistan, necessitate a fresh analysis of the group's activities. The TTP has adopted a more aggressive posture against the Pakistani government and military, with its tactics increasingly mirroring those of the Afghanistan Taliban. This shift has led the Pakistani government to designate the TTP as its most significant national security threat. According to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), in 2023, Pakistan experienced an unprecedented

increase in militant activity, with a dramatic 70 percent rise in attacks, an 81 percent increase in deaths, and a 62 percent rise in injuries. The majority of these attacks were conducted by the TTP, primarily targeting the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.¹ These recent developments underscore the need for an updated and in-depth examination of the TTP, providing crucial insights into its evolving threat and strategic implications.

Following the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan in 2021, the TTP has gained access to newer, more advanced weapons and relocated fighters from Afghanistan to Pakistan, now redirecting its focus to its war against the Pakistani state. In the past two years, the TTP has undergone multiple mergers, enhanced its media and operational activities, and moved away from the indiscriminate targeting of civilians in suicide bombings. The group has implemented new internal policies to centralize its organizational structure and adopted a localized strategy. With a strong organizational base and a focus on the Pakistani state, the TTP appears ready to emulate the Afghanistan Taliban and seize control of territories within Pakistan's tribal areas. The Taliban's victory in Afghanistan has significantly emboldened and strengthened the TTP, providing it with an unparalleled level of strategic depth due to the Taliban's supportive stance and control over Afghanistan.²

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach, utilizing a range of open sources, including research from Pakistani and Western research centers, official statements from Pakistani authorities, and primary literature such as *Mehsud Revolution*, *South Waziristan*, *From British Raj to American Imperialism* by the current leader of the TTP, Noor Wali Mehsud. The research also incorporates statistics, media reports, and insights from the researcher's long-term focus on Taliban and Pakistan-related issues. Challenges included the lack of a dedicated TTP website and reliable data on the number of attacks claimed by the group. The TTP's websites are often blocked by the Pakistani government, and the group does not always claim responsibility for attacks. High-profile incidents are sometimes unclaimed, and local conflicts may not receive media coverage. Additionally, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa faces complex issues such as ethnic and religious tensions, complicating efforts to obtain verified information.

Profile of the TTP

| Establishment

The TTP is a Salafi Jihadist group with multifaceted historical trajectory in Pakistan. Similar to Afghanistan Taliban, Pakistani Taliban also has its roots in the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Maulana Sufi Muhammad , who actively participated in the Afghanistan jihad against the Soviet Union, established Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) in 1992 . This extremist group sought to enforce Sharia (Islamic law) in the tribal areas of Bajaur, Swat, and Dir. This led to an armed uprising in support of TNSM's objectives, known for its significant impact on the region. Over the years, the movement fragmented into several factions. In 2002, the Pakistani government officially banned the group. The remnants of the TNSM, along with several other factions—comprising a total of 13 groups—coalesced to form the TTP.³

Following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the Pakistani military's operations in the tribal areas to pursue Al-Qaeda members, widespread discontent emerged in these regions. This unrest contributed to the formation of the TTP, an alliance of 13 militant Islamist groups, with Baitullah Mehsud as its first leader.⁴ Other notable TTP leaders have included Hakimullah Mehsud, Mullah Fazlullah, Khalid Mehsud, and Noor Wali Mehsud. TTP's stated objective is the overthrow of the elected government of Pakistan in order to establish an emirate based on its interpretation of Islamic law. To that end, TTP has worked to destabilize Pakistan by directly attacking the Pakistani army and assassinating politicians.⁵



Figure 1 Maulana Sufi Muhammad (Dawn Jul 12, 2019)



Figure 2 Baitullah Mehsud (France 24 Aug 8, 2009)

In 2008, Mullah Omar, the Taliban's leader at the time, sent a delegation led by Mullah Abdullah Zakir, Taliban Senior Military Commander in the South at that time, to Pakistan, requesting financial assistance from the Pakistani Taliban. Mullah Omar also urged them to set aside their disagreements and support him in the fight against the U.S. and NATO. Baitullah Mehsud, Hafiz Gul Bahadur, and Mullah Nazir, who had prior experience in the 1980s Afghanistan jihad, accepted Mullah Omar's proposal and pledged allegiance to him. Subsequently, the Pakistani Taliban dispatched fighters to Afghanistan and initiated attacks on U.S. positions.

The U.S. Department of State has noted the TTP's involvement in significant attacks, stating: "TTP has carried out and claimed responsibility for numerous terrorist acts against Pakistani and U.S. interests, including the December 2009 suicide attack on a U.S. military base in Khost, Afghanistan that killed seven U.S. citizens, as well as the April 2010 suicide bombing against the U.S. Consulate in Peshawar, Pakistan that killed six Pakistani citizens. TTP is suspected of involvement in the 2007 assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. TTP directed and facilitated Faisal Shahzad's failed attempt to detonate an explosive device in New York City's Times Square on May 1, 2010."⁶ U.S. Department of State designated TTP as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 2010, stating, "It is a crime to knowingly provide, or to attempt or conspire to provide, material support or resources to TTP."⁷

Leadership

The first emir (leader) and founder of the TTP, Baitullah Mehsud, was killed by a U.S. drone strike in South Waziristan in 2009.⁸ The second emir of the TTP, Hakimullah Mehsud, was killed in November 2013 by a U.S. drone strike in North Waziristan. The third emir, Mullah Fazlullah, son-in-law of Sufi Muhammad, evaded U.S. and Pakistani military attacks for an

extended period. He was eventually killed by a U.S. drone strike in June 2018 in a valley in Kunar province, near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

The current emir of the TTP, Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, brings a different approach compared to his predecessors, with a focus on media presence and leveraging his war experience. He has authored a book titled *Inqilab-e-Mehsud, South Waziristan: Firangi Raj se Amreeki Samraj Tak* (Mehsud Revolution, South Waziristan: From British Raj to American Imperialism), in which he claimed responsibility for the assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 2007. He is well-acquainted with the geography of Afghanistan and Pakistan and understands how to avoid aerial attacks.⁹ Estimated to be around 50 years old, Noor Wali Mehsud hails from the Mehsud tribe in South Waziristan, Pakistan. He has served as the head of the Pakistani Taliban courts and as the deputy to both the first TTP chief, Baitullah Mehsud, and Mullah Fazlullah. He received his religious education from madrasas in Faisalabad, Gujranwala, and Karachi—institutions that are predominantly Deobandi, with elements of Salafist tendencies present as well. Also known as “Abu Mansoor Asim,” he fought alongside the Afghanistan Taliban against the anti-Taliban Tajiks commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud’s forces in the 1990s. In his book, he recounts rushing to Kabul to fight after the September 11 attacks, only to find that the Afghanistan Taliban had already been overthrown.

Following the Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, the TTP’s attacks across Pakistan increased, necessitating a redefinition of its leadership structure and combat



Figure 3 TTP leader Noor Wali Mehsud (CNN Jul 26, 2021)

strategy. The previous umbrella structure became ineffective with the escalation of attacks, leading the TTP to adopt a model similar to that of the Afghanistan Taliban. This new structure includes shadow provinces, shadow district officials, and a central military commission responsible for key operational aspects.

| Structure

In 2022, the TTP announced a restructured organization featuring 139 members in the Leadership Council, seven ministries, an Intelligence Directorate, a Suicide Brigade and Training Camp, a Three-layer Court System, an Institute of Islamic Jurisprudence and a Housing Department. Additionally, the TTP established nine shadow provinces across Pakistan. Under the new structure, the Leadership Council, in consultation with the Emir, appoints shadow ministers. Only members of the Leadership Council are eligible to become ministers. The TTP's ministries include Information and Broadcasting, Political Affairs, Defense, Accountability, Education, Finance, and Welfare, along with a General Directorate of Intelligence. Each ministry is led by a minister and a deputy. The Defense Ministry is the largest unit within the TTP, consisting of two military commissions, namely North-zone and South-zone. Each military commission comprises six or seven TTP members, including a director and a deputy, who oversee the shadow provinces. Ministries designate provincial representatives based on recommendations from the military commissions.¹⁰

The nine shadow provinces correspond to the seven divisions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, plus one allocated to the Pashtun-majority Zhob division in Balochistan and another to Gilgit-Baltistan. In other regions of Pakistan, the TTP's organizational structure follows the "Dalgay" system. Dalgay (Pashtu: military unit) is the lowest unit in the TTP's military structure, adapted from the Afghanistan Taliban's model. The minimum requirement for a Dalgay is five members in urban areas and 12 to 25 members in tribal areas or shadow provinces. According to TTP Defense Minister Mufti Muzahim, the group has over 400 "Dalgay" units nationwide.¹¹

Another tactic employed by the TTP since 2021 involves using aggressive suicide attacks, a strategy previously utilized by the Taliban in major Afghanistan cities. In

this approach, several suicide attackers target a government institution, engaging in confrontations with security forces until they are all killed. This tactic disrupts urban order, draws media attention, and highlights the government's failure to ensure security. The TTP has notably employed this method more frequently in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, targeting military centers.¹²

This organizational model closely resembles the Taliban's military structure in Afghanistan over the past two decades, featuring shadow governors, military commissions, local courts, a powerful Emir, and an intelligence apparatus.

Geography of Operation

Initially, the TTP's area of influence was confined to the Pakistan's tribal regions, or FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Area), but it gradually expanded to other parts of Pakistan, where it carried out deadly attacks against Pakistani military forces. Since the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan, the TTP has increased its attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, followed by Sindh and Punjab. However, its primary territory remains the seven tribal regions adjacent to Afghanistan.¹³

The seven tribal regions of Pakistan, from north to south, are Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan. In 2018, after two major military operations, the Pakistani government merged these areas into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



Figure 3 Pakistani Taliban patrol in their stronghold of Shawal in Pakistani tribal region of South Waziristan, Aug. 5, 2012 (VOA Jul 11, 2024)

Ideology of the TTP

TTP is Salafi Jihadist group, yet it lacks a well-defined and systematically articulated ideology. Instead, its ideological inclination is influenced by Afghanistan Taliban factions and Al-Qaeda. Both the TTP and the Taliban adhere to the Deobandi school of Islam. Many of the group's leaders and prominent figures have studied in Pakistani madrasas and tribal areas, understanding Islam through a Deobandi lens. Their fatwas are derived from scholars educated in Pakistani madrasas, with influences from the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. In 2008, Baitullah Mehsud pledged allegiance to Mullah Omar, the Taliban's leader at the time, who had sent a delegation requesting that the Pakistani Taliban focus on Afghanistan, where foreign forces were present. Some TTP leaders have articulated aspirations to implement Sharia law in Pakistan and establish an Islamic government. However, they have not specified the model or type of Islamic government they seek—be it a caliphate, emirate, or otherwise—despite Pakistan already being an Islamic Republic.¹⁴

TTP's ideology is a blend of Salafism and tribal Pashtunwali (the traditional Pashtun code of conduct with tribal origins), with tribal customs sometimes taking precedence over Deobandi tendencies. While the group is heavily focused on its religious ideology, Pashtun ethnic elements also play a significant role in its identity and activities.¹⁵

The TTP maintains a harsh and tribal stance on women, human rights, and cooperation with Western countries, particularly the United States. The TTP exhibits extreme opposition towards Shias, women, and modern concepts such as democracy, freedom, and pluralism.

In regions where the TTP holds influence, girls' schools are closed, and the presence of women in society is virtually nonexistent. The TTP's severe stance on women's rights is evidenced by the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, and the attack on Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani schoolgirl who later received the Nobel Peace Prize.

All TTP leaders have expressed strong negative views about Western civilization, NATO forces in Afghanistan, and Pakistan's cooperation with NATO. They consider U.S. and Western intervention the root cause of regional instability, advocating for jihad against U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Following Baitullah Mehsud's pledge of allegiance to Mullah Omar, the focus of the Pakistani Taliban shifted to U.S. forces in Afghanistan,

making Americans a primary target of TTP's conflict in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. This resulted in the deaths of three TTP leaders and several senior commanders by U.S. drone strikes.¹⁶

Hafiz Gul Bahadur, a local TTP leader, strongly opposes the U.S. and views drone strikes as violations of Pakistan's sovereignty. He accuses Pakistan's leadership of being subservient to the West and U.S. and occasionally criticizes TTP leaders for being too lenient towards Pakistani government.

Post-2021 Terrorist Activities by TTP

The TTP is the most powerful militant group opposing the Pakistani government, though other groups such as the Balochistan Liberation Army and ISIS also carry out terrorist attacks. However, the scale, intensity, and number of TTP attacks surpass those of all other groups.¹⁷ The TTP does not claim responsibility for all its attacks for various reasons. Sometimes, large, medium, or even small attacks go unclaimed by any group in Pakistan. The TTP is aware that claiming all attacks would lead to public pressure and intensified military action from Pakistan.

The exact number of TTP attacks since the Taliban's rise to power in Pakistan remains unclear for several reasons. Firstly, the TTP only claims responsibility for attacks that serve its propaganda goals and do not provoke local opposition or public backlash. Secondly, the TTP's warfare strategy involves hit-and-run tactics, and its social media pages, and website are frequently blocked by the Pakistani government. The number of TTP-claimed attacks more than tripled between 2020 and 2022, with the monthly attack average increasing from 14.5 in 2020 to 23.5 in 2021 and 45.8 in 2022.¹⁸

Over the past three years, the Pakistani military has engaged in border clashes with the Taliban more than 30 times, with a significant portion of these conflicts concerning border management and the movement of TTP members. Pakistan and Afghanistan have previously experienced border issues and diplomatic tensions, with over 30 instances of clashes in the past three years alone. Some Pakistani and international organizations have analyzed TTP data from 2020 to 2023, but this does not cover all attacks or show the full extent of increasing violence. However, the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) has compiled data on all attacks by various groups, revealing

a rise in violence and insecurity. The Pakistani government has repeatedly stated that the TTP is a major source of insecurity in Pakistan, and the group's leaders and commanders reside in Afghanistan. ¹⁹

The exact number of Pakistani military casualties is also not yet determined. However, the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) has compiled the data from 2023, revealing that security forces were the most affected by suicide attacks, with 19 such incidents resulting in 150 deaths and 310 injuries among Pakistani military personnel, including police and army forces. ²⁰

The accompanying charts compare terrorist attacks across the years 2021, 2022, and 2023, illustrating trends and changes over these years. This data is sourced from the Pakistan Institute For Peace Studies. ²¹

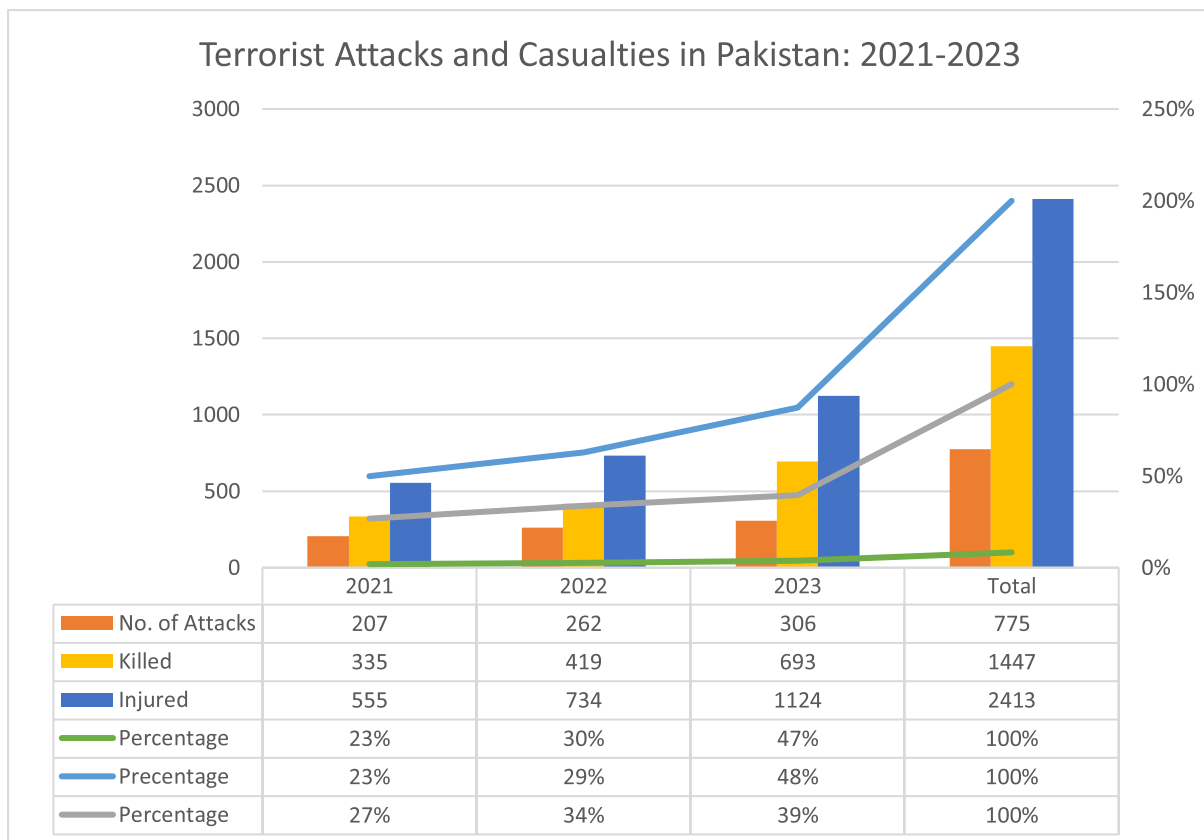


Figure 4 Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan 2021-2023 (Pak Institute For Peace Studies)²²

Terrorist Attacks and Casualties in Pakistan: 2021-2023

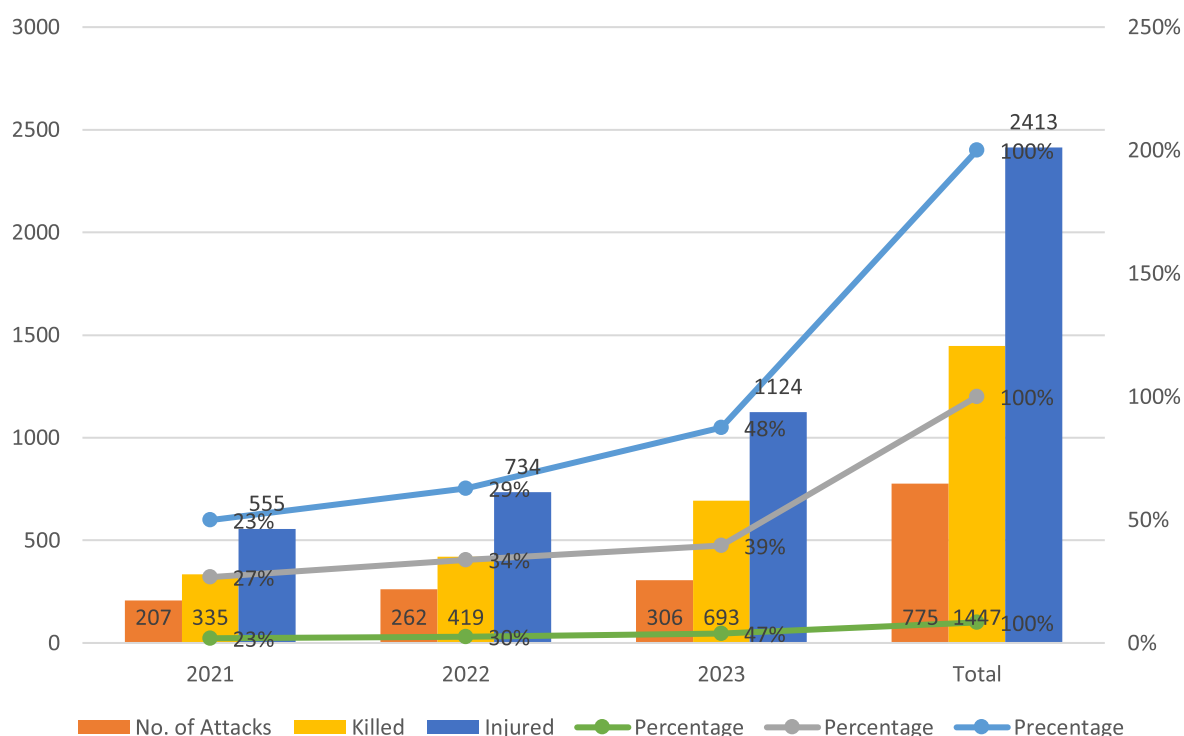


Figure 5 Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan 2021-2023 (Pak Institute For Peace Studies)²³

Number of TTP Fighters

Determining the exact number of TTP fighters is challenging. However, reports from credible sources provide various estimates. Some estimates suggest that TTP has between 30,000 and 35,000 members.²⁴ According to the U.N. Sanctions Monitoring Team report dated July 10, 2024, TTP continues to operate at a significant scale in Afghanistan and to conduct terrorist operations into Pakistan from there, often utilizing Afghans. The report also indicated that the globally designated terrorist group, also known as the Pakistani Taliban, has an estimated strength of 6,000-6,500 fighters in Afghanistan.²⁵

The shift in focus from jihad in Afghanistan to operations within Pakistan, coupled with reports of Afghanistan Taliban fighters participating in attacks, indicates a notable increase in the number of TTP fighters.

Yaqoob Mujahid, Taliban Defense Minister, stated that the group's forces are instructed not to engage in cross-border jihad. Nonetheless, there have been observed instances of Taliban fighters joining the TTP, suggesting a significant rise in TTP numbers since the fall of Kabul.²⁶

Financial Sources of the TTP

TTP relies on multiple financial sources to sustain its operations, including smuggling and drug trafficking, extortion and kidnapping for ransom, illegal taxation and protection money, and support from affiliated terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and the Afghanistan Taliban.²⁷

A major source of the TTP's revenue is drug trafficking. Afghanistan, a leading producer of narcotics, is central to this trade. The TTP uses its network to facilitate the transport of drugs from Afghanistan to Pakistan, with a portion sold in Iran and the remainder distributed by local and international smugglers within Pakistan. The group also engages in extortion and blackmail, extracting money from local residents, traders, and markets in areas under its control to finance its activities.²⁸

Claims have been made regarding India's financial support for the TTP. In May 2024, Asif Durrani, Pakistan's Special Representative for Afghanistan, asserted that "Indians have been providing financial support to the TTP in Afghanistan, a practice that has reportedly continued since the presidency of Hamid Karzai."²⁹ While some Pakistani officials have cited India's alleged financial contributions via Afghanistan, concrete evidence has not been presented by Pakistan, and India dismisses these claims as part of Pakistan's negative propaganda.

Moreover, funds are frequently collected under the guise of religious donations. In Pakistan's tribal areas, contributions intended for mosque construction, madrasa support, and religious obligations (ushr and zakat) can be diverted to support the TTP. This practice highlights how religious and charitable activities can be exploited to finance terrorist operations.

The Relationship between Pakistani and the Afghanistan Taliban

The Taliban's ascension to power in Afghanistan has instilled a profound sense of confidence among many Islamist groups, particularly TTP. The Taliban's victory has emboldened the TTP, fostering a belief that if the Afghanistan Taliban could defeat the U.S. and NATO, they too could achieve similar success. The Taliban often reminds the TTP of its triumph over forty countries and NATO, implying that the TTP can similarly overcome the Pakistani government.³⁰ This has inspired TTP fighters, many of whom are madrasa students who view their fight against the Pakistani government as a sacred duty, to aim to establish a Taliban-like system in Pakistan. This belief is so ingrained that TTP leadership is preparing for a prolonged attrition warfare against the Pakistani government.

| 1. Strategic Rear Base

The 2,600-kilometer border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is notoriously difficult to manage due to its challenging terrain and lack of effective governance. This ungovernable border acts as a strategic rear base for the TTP. After launching attacks, TTP fighters can easily cross into Afghanistan and find refuge in these areas. The TTP employs tactics that the Afghanistan Taliban have developed and refined in the past 20 years.³¹

Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, there have been 13 clashes between Pakistani military forces and Taliban fighters along the border, highlighting ongoing tensions and mistrust. The Pakistani government believes that the Afghanistan Taliban have provided a sanctuary for the TTP within Afghanistan. Pakistani military operations to target TTP bases in Afghanistan face significant challenges due to this ungovernable border. Additionally, the TTP does not maintain fixed bases in Pakistan; instead, it relies on guerrilla tactics.³²

Pakistani military strategists had hoped that a favorable Islamist government in Kabul would enhance Pakistan's strategic depth. However, the reality is that this ungovernable border has instead become a strategic asset for the TTP, providing them with a safe haven and complicating efforts by the Pakistani government to combat the group.

| 2. Access to Modern Weapons

The TTP's ability to challenge the Pakistani military and pose a threat to national security is significantly bolstered by their access to advanced weaponry left behind by U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan. The Taliban have facilitated the transfer of these weapons to the TTP, and they are also available on Afghanistan's black market.³³ In an exclusive interview with CNN, Pakistani Taliban leader Noor Wali Mehsud remarked,

“We are fighting Pakistan’s war from within the territory of Pakistan; using Pakistani soil. We have the ability to fight for many more decades with the weapons and spirit of liberation that exist in the soil of Pakistan.” 34

Pakistani media reports indicate that TTP fighters have acquired M4 and M16 rifles, night vision devices, and American sniper rifles—highly advanced weaponry previously provided only to Afghanistan commandos. These modern arms are now in the hands of TTP fighters, who use them against the Pakistani military. 35

Despite being one of the largest and most capable military forces in the region, and having provided military consulting to Gulf countries, the Pakistani military faces significant vulnerabilities. The presence of advanced weapons and the guerrilla tactics employed by the TTP present a substantial challenge, even to a well-trained and nuclear-capable military like Pakistan’s.

3. Deobandi Islam

A key reason for the Afghan Taliban’s support for the TTP is their shared Deobandi interpretation of Islam. Both the Afghanistan and Pakistani Taliban are educated in Deobandi madrasas, sharing common curricula, teachers, and institutions. Consequently, members of the Taliban and TTP often have overlapping backgrounds. The TTP has supported the Afghanistan Taliban through fundraising activities, known as “chanda,” collected from mosques and madrasas. In turn, the Taliban supports the TTP, viewing it as a religious duty. The Afghanistan Taliban respects Pakistani muftis and madrasa graduates as religious authorities, and the TTP models its approach after the Taliban’s governance in Afghanistan. Both Taliban leader Mullah Hibatullah and TTP leader Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud consider mutual support a religious obligation.³⁶

| 4. Ethnicity and Kinship

Ethnicity and kinship are crucial factors in the relationship between the Taliban and the TTP. Both groups share significant cultural, ethnic, and familial ties. Research from Stanford University reveals that the majority of TTP fighters, including their leaders, are of Pashtun ethnicity. Similarly, Afghanistan Taliban members, including high-ranking officials, commanders, and fighters, are also ethnically Pashtun. These strong cultural and ethnic connections make it challenging to distinguish between the two groups.

Over the past two decades, numerous intermarriages between Pakistan and Afghanistan Taliban members have further reinforced their relationship. This deep-rooted ethnic and familial connection partly explains why the Taliban Afghanistan is hesitant to take action against the TTP. It is unlikely that the Afghanistan Taliban would engage in military action against their own relatives and ideological kin.³⁷ Pashtunwali customs, which emphasize hospitality and protection of guests, facilitate the TTP's ability to seek refuge in Afghanistan.

Policy Recommendations

1. Diplomatic and Strategic Engagement

- **Unified Approach:** The United States, Canada, and European countries should adopt a consistent and unified approach towards the Afghanistan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban, recognizing their interdependent relationship and mutual support. This requires coordinated diplomatic efforts and intelligence sharing to address the threat they pose collectively rather than in isolation.
- **Conditional Engagement:** Engage with the Afghanistan Taliban through conditional diplomacy, where continued dialogue and potential incentives are contingent on verifiable commitments to sever ties with terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the TTP. This should include pressure to reduce human rights violations and ensure humanitarian aid reaches civilian populations without being siphoned off to militant groups.

2. Economic and Sanction Measures

- **Targeted Sanctions:** Implement targeted sanctions against key leaders and financial networks of both the Taliban and the TTP. This should include freezing assets, travel bans, and cutting off any financial flows that directly or indirectly support their operations.
- **Financial Transparency:** Collaborate with international financial institutions to enhance transparency in aid distribution to Afghanistan, ensuring that funds intended for reconstruction and humanitarian purposes do not benefit militant groups. This includes setting up robust monitoring mechanisms and working closely with non-governmental organizations on the ground.

3. Counter-Extremism and Ideological Initiatives

- **Counter-Ideology Programs:** Develop comprehensive counter-ideology programs that target the jihadist narrative propagated by the Taliban and the TTP. This involves creating and disseminating counter-narratives that emphasize peace, tolerance, and coexistence through social media platforms and community outreach programs.

- **Education Reform:** Support educational reforms in Afghanistan and Pakistan that promote critical thinking and secular education, reducing the influence of extremist madrasas. This includes investing in schools that offer balanced curricula and teacher training programs that emphasize democratic values and human rights.

| 4. Military and Security Measures

- **Precision Strikes and Intelligence Operations:** Utilize precision military operations, such as drone strikes, to target high-value leaders of the TTP and disrupt their operational capabilities. This should be done with careful intelligence to minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage, thereby maintaining local and international support.

- **Collaborative Security Efforts:** Work with regional partners, including Pakistan's military, to address the misuse of religious extremism as a strategic tool. This requires fostering dialogue with Pakistan to ensure that efforts to counter the TTP are not undermined by internal political dynamics.

| 5. Social and Economic Development

- **Local Grievance Addressal:** Address the legitimate grievances of local populations in Pakistan's tribal areas and Afghanistan by supporting development projects that improve living conditions, such as infrastructure, healthcare, and employment opportunities. This helps reduce the appeal of extremist groups by providing alternative livelihoods.

- **Community-Based Programs:** Invest in community-based programs that foster social cohesion and resilience against extremist influences. This includes supporting local leaders and civil society organizations that promote dialogue, reconciliation, and community development initiatives.

These policy recommendations aim to provide a holistic approach to mitigating the threat posed by the Taliban and the TTP while addressing the root causes of ideological jihadism. Through coordinated efforts, the United States, Canada, and European countries can contribute to regional stability and prevent the further spread of extremism.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the TTP has evolved from a manageable threat into a severe crisis for Pakistan. Initially concentrated in tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the TTP now operates across all four provinces, with significant activity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

The rise in TTP attacks and the growing instability in Pakistan are closely linked to the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan. This study identifies four key areas illustrating the impact of this relationship. Despite limited comprehensive statistics, available data reveals a troubling trend: a steady increase in TTP activities and associated casualties.

Statements from Pakistani leaders—including the Prime Minister, President, and Chief of Army Staff—highlight the presence of TTP militants in Afghanistan as a major source of Pakistan's insecurity. Deteriorating relations between Islamabad and Kabul, marked by mutual blame, have exacerbated the crisis. Despite significant costs and efforts, Pakistan has yet to develop an effective strategy for managing this threat, particularly in its border provinces.

Once viewed as a localized threat, the TTP now poses a substantial danger to South and Central Asia. Despite possessing one of the world's largest military forces, Pakistan has struggled to counter the TTP's guerrilla tactics. The situation is further complicated by energy shortages, strained relations with India, and economic and demographic challenges. The TTP presents additional hurdles that could potentially undermine Pakistan's stability as a nuclear power with a population of 270 million.

End notes

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⁶ “Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP),” Reward For Justice, 2010, <https://rewardsforjustice.net/rewards/tehrik-e-taliban-pakistan-ttp/>.

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