Terrorism in Pakistan after 2021 Emerging Threats, Hybrid Security Challenges and Counter Terrorism Responses

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ABSTRACT: Overall, terrorism remains a serious threat to the national security of Pakistan despite the achievements and promises made via the military actions, intelligence-led operations and institutionalization efforts. The security environment of the country has significantly changed since 2021, owing to the resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), presence of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), ongoing insurgency in Balochistan and a rise in the intersection of terrorism and digitization, with transnational criminal networks. This paper looks at the dynamics of terrorism in Pakistan and its changing nature and evaluates the emerging threats, facilitating socio-political factors and state responses to terrorism. The study employs a qualitative methodology using data from secondary sources including scholarly papers, government documents, and international publications on security issues, to explore counter terrorism policies, counter terrorism measures based on intelligence, border management, legal reforms, and regional cooperation. The results suggest that modern-day terrorism is becoming more decentralized, technologically flexible, and ideologically heterodox, arguing for more concerted strategies to censor the virus effect that combines security measures with better governance, socioeconomic development, institution coordination and regional cooperation to guarantee a sustainable security in the nations.

KEYWORDS: Terrorism, Pakistan, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, ISKP, Counter Terrorism, National Action Plan, Radicalization, National Security

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Introduction

Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, terrorism has been one of the longest and most complicated security issues that Pakistan currently has to deal with. Being at the cross-roads of the South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East, Pakistan specifically has been subjected to the impact of many regional wars, ideological extremism, proxy war, cross-border militancy, and transnational security threats. After the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan has emerged as a frontline state against terrorism on the international front, and the overall security situation in the country changed drastically. This transformation led to the formation, growth, and radicalization of groups that are armed and motivated by

ideological, sectarian, ethnic, and political goals that further transformed the country's national security dynamics (Fair et al., 2026).

In the last 20 years, Pakistan has suffered thousands of terrorist attacks against civilians, schools/ colleges, mosques, security personnel, government buildings and institutions, diplomatic centres, and big economic enterprises. The impact of these attacks has resulted in significant human, economic, and institutional costs. Aside from the shocking toll on lives, terrorism has also left indescribable impacts on foreign investment, business trades and infrastructure, public spending on security, public confidence in state institutions and long-term socio-economic developments in the present era, as such, terrorism no longer poses a classical security threat, but rather a challenge to good governance, influencing political stability, economic resilience as well as social cohesion in a multidimensional manner (Hirblinger & Perera, 2026).

The real threat in Pakistan's counter terrorism strategy has shifted significantly as a result of the changing threat landscape. The initial policy interventions were mainly aimed at breaking the militants' control in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and parts of Balochistan through large-scale military operations. The critical operations undertaken under Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb and Radd ul-Fasaad have substantially reduced the operational utility of a number of militant groups and ushered in a new era of the restoration of the writ of the state in areas where it was being challenged. In 2014, Pakistan saw the launch of the National Action Plan (NAP), which positions the country toward a more comprehensive approach where military operations are not just one aspect of its solution to violent extremism, but a combined approach that also includes intelligence-led policing, financial regulations, legal reforms, education, and institutional coordination (Acocella, 2026).

Nevertheless, the current terror scene in Pakistan has moved into a new era – one where terrorist organizations have adapted, new technologies have emerged, and even more decentralized action networks of terrorists have appeared. The re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan as the ruling party in August 2021 significantly affected the dynamics of regional security and provided the opportunity for the so-called militant organisations to bolster their cross-border movement, reorganize their leadership and step up attacks on Pakistani security institutions, especially Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). At the same time, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) is still working to carry out high-profile attacks designed to weaken the government, stir up sectarian tensions, and consolidate its power in the province. Meanwhile, violent attacks against security forces, strategic infrastructure, and large investment projects in Balochistan have been increasing since then, underlining that there are multiple and intermingled strands of violent extremism in action in Pakistan today (Bukhari, 2024).

Terrorism has also ceased to be defined by the use of conventional weapons for armed rebellion. Today, new technologies in the digital sphere have revolutionized the modes of recruitment and propaganda dissemination, operational planning, communications and financing of extremist and terrorist acts. Not only have the amount of information and communication technologies that can be encrypted—such as encrypted messaging applications, social media platforms, artificially intelligent technologies, cryptocurrencies and commercially available drone technologies—allowed for more effective organization and coordination, but they have also led to a decrease in reliance on traditional organizational structures. Such developments have increased the range and reach of extremist networks, as well as bringing new opportunities and difficulties to intelligence organizations, law-enforcement institutions, and national security decision-makers to work against technologically enabled forms of terrorism (Wassan et al., 2026).

Not less vitally, terrorism is not only a military or security-related issue in Pakistan. Governance issues, political instability, socioeconomic inequality, unemployment, disparities in education, sectarian polarization, identity-based violence and rivalry, and regional geopolitical tensions remain conducive to radicalization and radical recruitment. It is evident that the mutual influence of domestic structural weaknesses and foreign geopolitical events shows that terrorism is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is not just ideologically and militaristically but also politically, economically, socially, technologically, and institutionally. It becomes apparent that the relationship between internal and external factors represents a multi-dimensional phenomenon of terrorism, encompassing aspects that extend beyond purely ideological and militaristic dimensions to political, economic, social, technological, and institutional dimensions (Adamson, 2020).

This complexity is only increased by geopolitical developments across the region. Afghanistan's instability, regional and international strategic rivalry, changing security dynamics between Pakistan and India, refugee flows, border management issues, illegal trafficking and transnational criminal networks all impact Pakistan's security. These developments are interconnected and have brought concepts such as regional diplomacy, intelligence cooperation and integrated border governance to the forefront as key elements of national counter terrorism policy (Segovia, 2026).

The conflation of public and private is also further complicated by the rise of hybrid security threats, which increasingly blur the lines between public and private, between terrorism and organized crime and cybercrime and information warfare, and between financial and cybercrime. Modern militant groups are increasingly using online propaganda, misinformation campaigns, encrypted digital communications, cyber-facilitated fundraising, and psychological operations to promote organizational resiliency and shape public perceptions. The convergence creates such a need for Pakistan to modernize its counter terrorism architecture by strengthening security institutions (Böhmelt & Bakaki, 2026) with cyber intelligence, digital forensics, artificial intelligence, financial intelligence, and interagency coordination.

A large amount of literature has explored the topic of terrorism in Pakistan, but most of the literature deals with one militant group, an operation, or one security event or situation. There has been relatively little focus on analyzing how all these collectively change the contemporary terrorism landscape in Pakistan, consequent to a resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, regional geopolitical shifts, institutional reforms, and socioeconomic drivers. Furthermore, very limited research includes these changing dynamics of security in a broader analysis to explain and understand the changing nature of terrorism and Pakistan's multi-dimensional state response to it (Gul, 2026).

In this context, the current research aims to highlight the transformation in the nature of Pakistan's terrorism, emerging threats to national security, effectiveness of States' responses, and future security challenges. It examines how militant groups respond to new challenges strategically, evaluates trends in Pakistan's counter terrorism mechanisms and strategies, and considers policy choices that could help Pakistan cope both with the current threats and the structural factors supporting violent extremism. The research's incorporation of modern security advancements with a much wider governance, technology, and regional view makes it more relevant and adds to the growing body of work on terrorism and national security, and provides evidence for the enhancement of Pakistan's long-term peace, resilience, and strategic stability.

Literature Review

Historical Evolution of Terrorism in Pakistan and the Emergence of Contemporary Militancy

Terrorism studies have increased significantly in Pakistan over the last two decades, with the changing geopolitics and the flexible nature of militant organizations in the region and the country. Traditional scholarship focused on

religious extremism and insurgency, with an accent on ideological radicalization and domestic militant violence. Recent research, however, has begun to treat terrorism as a multi-dimensional phenomenon driven by several forces that are all at play in a particular region: political turmoil, regional armed conflict, governance issues, technological revolution, socioeconomic inequity, as well as trans-national extremist ideologies. This change is a recognition that modern-day terrorism can no longer be regarded from a strictly military or ideology-driven standpoint; rather, it must be analyzed from an integrated point of view in the political, economic, institutional and technological domains. However, all these enrichments have been marred in recent times by a series of events, such as the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) resurgence, the spread of Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), and the rise of cyber extremism, which necessitated a reassessment of Pakistan's current security landscape (Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2026).

Considerable literature exists on the historical antecedents of the current terrorism in Pakistan, which was key to changing the security dynamics in the region since the Afghan Soviet War in 1979-1989. In this time span, Pakistan emerged as the main logistical and strategic centre for the Afghan resistance movement, with widespread support from outside Pakistan by way of international cooperation. The debate is that this battle helped establish the infrastructure of militancy, spread weapons, and allowed the proliferation of religious schools, which later came to play a key role in ideology and recruitment of different extremist groups. These networks were originally used for Afghanistan, but they eventually developed organizational abilities of their own, abilities that had a long-lasting impact on security within Pakistan after the Soviet pullout. More than a post-9/11 phenomenon, current terrorism has been seen as the product of historical political and security developments that led to the institutionalization of militancy in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands (Bukhari, 2026).

The document also points out that the September 11, 2001 attacks were a critical turning point in Pakistan's security path. After aligning itself with the United States-led Global War on Terror, Pakistan's strategic focus and domestic security landscape have largely transformed. As noted in previous studies, militant groups now focused on Afghanistan started re-channeling their efforts against the Pakistani state, which they consider an enemy due to its cooperation with the international community against terrorism. The culmination of these changes was the founding of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in 2007, when various militant groups coalesced under one organizational framework and started challenging the political, military, and constitutional structure in Pakistan. Researchers and analysts have consistently expressed that the formation of the TTP group acted as a turning point in the history of terrorism in Pakistan, which shifted from pointy-headed and local-based militancy to a coordinated effort of an insurgent group with security impacts on the country (Adhikary, 2026).

In the current literature, the T.T.P. is identified as the most continuous threat to internal security in Pakistan. Scientists suggest it is a very adaptive militant umbrella organization that could withstand constant military pressure by organizing itself in a decentralized manner, forming strategic alliances, recruiting locally, and being mobile across borders. Previous research often found that from 2014 to 2018, there was a comprehensive military operation that severely impeded the operation of the organization and considerably reduced the level of violence related to terrorism in Pakistan. Yet, recent research has called into question the optimistic valuation and suggests that TTP is resilient and can undergo regeneration. One of the keys to the Taliban's ability to regroup in Afghanistan and improve recruitment, reestablish functioning command and control, and increase cross-border incursions against security forces in Pakistan has been the restoration of its leadership in 2021. Findings indicate that military victory alone cannot uproot organizations, which are able to adjust to the rapidly changing regional political landscape (Bhojwani, 2026).

As a whole, the literature reviewed in this section presents a picture of terrorism in Pakistan having an incremental historical growth with intertwining strands of regional conflict, geopolitical change, growing institutions, and evolving organizations rather than being a collection of security incidents. The trajectory from the Afghan-Soviet war to the present-day era of terror post 9/11 to the present-day post-2021 phase of rise in the terrorist militancy of the militant organizations depicts the dynamism and constant changing of the characteristics of the terrorism landscape in Pakistan. This historical evolution is important to consider as background to the extent of newer extremist players, new operational methods, and the growing complexity of security concerns explored in the remainder of this review.

Contemporary Terrorist Landscape in Pakistan

There is a wealth of current research that suggests that Pakistan's terrorism isn't only due to what would be termed ideological extremists or military insurgency. Rather, scholars now stress how governance failures, socioeconomic inequalities, political instability, institutional failure, and technological changes all contribute to the security situation in the country. From an analysis of historical literature, this multidimensional approach follows a clear paradigm shift from earlier studies that focused on a specific militant organization toward wider studies on the structures rendering the groups susceptible to being radicalized, recruited, and still resilient. Thus, terrorism is now seen as a security threat and governance challenge that calls for more encompassing political, economic, social and institutional responses besides strict coercive actions (Ali et al., 2025).

Governance has become one of the most mentioned factors causing and sustaining terrorism in Pakistan. Political scientists suggest that low capacity of state institutions, corruption, failure to provide public services, judicial inactivity and administrative absence lead to governance conditions which have enabled the influence of extremist groups to take root in marginalized communities. It can be seen that the longstanding apathy of the institutions, limited access to education, low education standards, underdeveloped infrastructure, and lack of economic opportunity were all major factors in the recruitment for militancy in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) before it was incorporated into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. While administrative changes have helped boost the state's presence, ongoing investments in education, healthcare, infrastructure, job creation, and institutional legitimacy are all essential components of sustainable peace; no one single element of governance should be taken for granted (Ali et al., 2025).

There has been a great deal of debate, both academic and otherwise, about the link between socioeconomic factors and the occurrence of terrorism. The literature says there is a link between poverty and unemployment, income inequalities and social exclusion, with vulnerability to recruitment by extremists, especially for young people with limited education and economic opportunities. Economists, on the other hand, have relatively strong theories that have not been substantiated by clear evidence, as other scholars have shown that economic deprivation alone is not always the most determining factor for the recruitment of militants, though the lack of prospects in poor neighborhoods does serve as an important consideration. This has led to an increasing use of explanations that are multidimensional in nature, incorporating both economic, political, psychological, and ideological aspects in today's research because no single factor can alone explain the process of radicalization.

However, the scholarship has also recently noted the potential for technology to be a transformative factor in extremist activity. Previously, much of the attention surrounding recruitment was on physical recruitment via religious seminaries and local extremist groups, but more recent research has shown that increasingly, recruitment takes place via encrypted messaging apps, websites, social media, online forums and virtual communities and gaming environments. Scholars also report that artificial intelligence, cryptocurrencies, commercial (civil) drone

technologies, cyber capabilities and deep fakes are increasingly being used for recruitment, billing and bookkeeping, operational planning, propaganda dissemination and communication in an organization. The use of these technologies has drastically improved the appendage and transnational links of extremist groups and has, at the same time, made intelligence gathering, digital monitoring, and law enforcement activities more difficult. Therefore, it is suggested that in future counter terrorism strategies, Cyber intelligence, Digital forensics, Artificial intelligence, and technological capabilities should be integrated with traditional security. (Jamaludin et al., 2026; Parepa, 2026).

A large amount of literature has emerged alongside the analyses of the structural drivers of terrorism, which gauge the changing face of Pakistan's counter terrorism strategy. It would be accepted by scholars that military operations, such as Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, had a significant impact on eliminating the infrastructure, destroying the sanctuaries, disrupting the logistical movement of the militants and giving back government control over once-challenged areas. However, everyone agrees that military victory is not by itself a guarantee of enduring security, as extremist organizations are able to adapt during the present conflict with decentralized organizational structures, ideological innovation, cross-border mobility, and other such loopholes in governance. This recognition has boosted the focus on each of the types of comprehensive counter terrorism – which includes military, policing, intelligence, institutional reform, socioeconomic development, and preventing violent extremism (PVTE) (Mahouachi & Gouia-Zarrad, 2025).

National Action Plan (NAP) is one of the most broadly studied aspects of Pakistan's counter terrorism policy after the Army Public School attack in the city of Peshawar in December of 2014. NAP has generally been described in the literature as the first-ever policy in the country, integrating the major elements of the military campaign, judicial reforms, coordination of intelligence operations, financial regulations, educational initiatives, media oversight, and restrictions on terrorist financing. Researchers recognize the efforts to strengthen intelligence, enhance Border management, restrict financial networks, and improve institutional coordination measurably. But there is also a number of studies within the literature that have identified implementation gaps, especially in the areas of: regulation of hate speech, reform of religious education, strengthening civilian law-enforcement bodies, prosecuting terrorism cases in ordinary courts, and effective counter-narratives against violent extremism. Collectively, these findings indicate that although kinetic counter terrorism measures in Pakistan have shown considerable improvement, the continuing process of institutional reforms will play a crucial role in making success tangible in the long run, both on the operational and structural aspects of terrorism (Ahmed et al., 2025).

In conclusion, overall, the orientations of the literature indicate that the evolving counter terrorism approach in Pakistan depicts a process of progressive shift from a military-centric approach to broader governance-based approaches that include security, institutional reform, socioeconomic development, and technical revolution. However, what is clear is that today's terrorists are adaptive and fault, and there is a need for constant innovation in counter terrorist policy, coordination of institutions, and preventive governance. These observations serve as a basis for evaluating the regional security landscape, evolving “hybrid” threats, and lingering gaps which continue to plague Pakistan's future counter terrorism security needs and are addressed in the concluding section of this review.

Regional Dynamics, Hybrid Threats, and Research Gap

A major strand in the discussion of terrorism in Pakistan has been regional security dynamics. The Pakistan-Afghanistan border has always been an open source of smuggling both of militants and weapons, as well as of illegal goods and hawala money due to its rugged geography, proximity to tribal areas, and poor regulation. The scholars generally acknowledge that Pakistan has developed good inputs in the area of border governance, including border fencing, biometric registration systems, surveillance infrastructure, and regulated crossing points. The papers,

however, highlight the fact that in the case of cross-border militancy, physical barriers are not sufficient on their own for eradication. Political cooperation with Afghanistan and ongoing exchange of intelligence information, coupled with coordinated law enforcement mechanisms and agreed procedures to deal with cross-border incidents, are essential for sustainable border security. For this reason, state-based measures of unilateral border management have, therefore, remained constrained until now by diplomatic strain and instability in Afghanistan (Ullah, 2026).

Terrorism has also been the subject of significant study in its international aspects. Foreign fighters, transnational ideological networks, illicit trafficking, informal financial systems, narcotics economies, and proxy competition in the region are found to be critical vectors that continue to sustain militant groups. Terrorist groups are more likely to put in place transnational networks that provide access to their funding, propaganda platforms, logistics, and weapons from various jurisdictions. International organizations have consequently stepped up their efforts to counter terrorist financing; they have done so via anti-money laundering provisions, financial intelligence cooperation, sanctions, and improving the monitoring of informal transfer mechanisms. Thus, Pakistan's compliance-upgrading packages are generally seen as a key element in Pakistan's general compliance framework, despite the constant problem of enforcement capacity and institutional consistency (Bhatti et al., 2020).

The term hybrid security threats is making its way in recent literature to describe how much the mechanisms of terrorism, organized crime, cybercrime, disinformation, and geopolitical competition are intertwined. This viewpoint questions the separateness of physical and digital security, showing how militant groups blend physical attacks with online propaganda, psychological operations, illegal money, disinformation, and cyber-enabled coordination. Today, terrorist groups rely no longer solely on the use of territoriality-focused command and control mechanisms, but on a much more flexible digital ecology which facilitates decentralized recruitment, remote planning, anonymous communication and even rapid dissemination of ideology. These advances have not only increased the robustness of extremist networks but also have made traditional intelligence and law enforcement countermeasures more difficult (Burrell & Long, 2026).

The literature also suggests that the future counter terrorism environment in Pakistan is going to change with the advent of emerging technologies. AI can be used for automatic propaganda creation, for tailoring propaganda to specific target groups, for automatic translation, for monitoring and evading surveillance, and for visual and auditory propaganda manipulation. Cheap, off-the-shelf drones can be used to deliver missions for recon, weapons, or attack strategic sites, and using encrypted communication platforms can make missions hard to detect by traditional monitoring. There are also new opportunities in the use of cryptocurrencies and other electronic financial assets for anonymous fundraising and transnational transactions. While some studies have begun to explore these risks, the intersection of artificial intelligence, autonomous communication, and drone technologies, along with deep fakes and financial support via AI-enabled platforms in the context of Pakistan's terrorism remains largely under-researched (Sinuraya et al., 2026).

There are a number of more general analytical problems in the literature reviewed. First, a considerable amount of literature is still focused on the post-9/11 era and the peak years of insurgent violence up until 2018. The changed security landscape since the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in 2021 has therefore yet to be investigated and analyzed to this level of depth. Second, TTP, ISKP, sectarian militancy, Baloch insurgency, cyber terrorism and digital radicalization are treated as distinct issues rather than interlinked ones. "This disjointed approach stifles an understanding of how these threats interact and learn from one another, how they overlap, and how they combine to re-calibrate Pakistan's security context."

Thirdly, the literature still emphasizes kinetic counter terrorism and organization disruption over preventive and governance approaches. Institutional quality, governance and community resilience, education reform, strategic communication, rehabilitation and countering radicalization are relatively under-researched with regard to military campaigns, intelligence operations and border controls. This imbalance results in partial knowledge concerning the means by which operational success is equated with peace that is sustainable. Fourthly, many studies highlight the adaptation to technology, but they fail to engage with the institutional implications for intelligence, police, judicial, financial and cyber security institutions in Pakistan (Sinuraya et al., 2026).

The present study attempts to overcome these limitations in the study of the evolving nature of terrorism in Pakistan by analyzing it in an integrated way, focusing on security, governance, geopolitical, socioeconomic, and technological aspects together. It does not view militant groups and the state's responses as separate topics but as a synthesis of militant organizational adaptation, regional instability, digital transformation, border insecurity, institutional capacity, and structural factors of extremism. From this perspective, terrorism can be viewed as a fused national-security issue that is simultaneously influenced by domestic vulnerabilities and transnational dynamics (Chen, 2026).

Thus, the study represents a synthesis of the above dimensions, with a significant contribution to the literature on the following three points. It offers a post-2021 assessment of the changing threat landscape in Pakistan, incorporates various types of militancy and security threats in the hybrid threat context, and appraises the effectiveness of state responses in tackling both current and context-specific mitigation of violent extremism. Thus, the conceptual underpinning to analyse the future threats of terrorism from within and without the country, evaluation of Pakistan's counter terrorism structure, and the institutional and policy changes required for countering the suspected future threats form a conceptual framework of the review of terrorism.

Research Methodology

The methodology for the present study is qualitative with an explanatory and exploratory design of the study to explore the changing dynamics of Terrorism in Pakistan, emerging security threats, the state's responses, and challenges for future counter-terrorism. It fulfills an interpretative paradigm, which provides the understanding that terrorism is a phenomenon that is constantly growing and evolving in relation to political, socioeconomic, technological, and geopolitical factors. The data is gathered from the secondary sources only, peer-reviewed journal (articles), academic books, government documents, policy reports, international organization documents, security databases and from other reputable research institutions like National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), United Nations, RAND Corporation, SIPRI, International Crisis Group, and others. Qualitative content analysis was performed to find commonalities around points related to militant organizations, adaptation to technology, governance issues, regional security dynamics, and counterterrorism strategies. Comparative policy analysis has also been used to analyse the techno-evolution of Pakistan's Counterterrorism (CT) umbrella, institutional response to new emerging hybrid security threats, and policy implications for securing national and regional security in the long term.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is conceptualized in light of an integrated theoretical framework of Realism, Human Security Theory, Constructivism, and Securitization Theory to have a holistic view of the changing scenario of terrorism in Pakistan. The Realist paradigm leaves 'terrorism' as an issue of national security and considers that states have to focus on internal and external threats, which raises the notion of sovereignty and territorial integrity, military

preparedness, and intelligence capabilities. Human Security Theory expands the scope of the analysis to include individual security and freedoms from violence, poverty, political marginalization, and social vulnerability, which lead to recruitment to extremism. Constructivism emphasizes the role of ideology, identity, religious stories, and social norms in the process of radicalization and the behavior of militant organizations. According to Securitization Theory, actors of a government communicate a threat of terror as an existential crisis that mandates exceptional security policy change, such as extending intelligence agencies, emergency security regulations, legislation, and military actions. Together, these angles offer a multidimensional analysis with security, governance, ideology and societal resilience.

Research Gap

Previous research tends to focus on a single aspect (whether a militant organization, military action, or a single security issue). There is limited research work that collectively examines the 2021 post taliban terrorism scene in Pakistan, considering emerging technologies, hybrid threats, governance issues, regional geopolitics, and the shifting tactics of the state. This study focuses on these aspects within a long-range analytical framework.

Scope of the Study

This study takes a particular interest in developments primarily taking place since 2014, and since the Taliban retook Afghanistan in 2021. Religious Terrorism, sectarian violence, ethnonationalist insurgencies, cyber-enabled extremism, and responses to religious terrorism by the state in Pakistan are all covered here.

Limitations

There are some limitations associated with this study. First, primary sources are very limited, using secondary data sources where possible due to restrictions on access to classified intelligence, operational records, and sensitive security information. Secondly, statistical data on terrorism can differ from one institution to another as a result of variations in the way such statistics are collected, reported and defined. Second, the reliability of quantitative data on the incidence of terrorism may also be different across institutions owing to variation in methods of data collection, reporting and definition. Thirdly, the nature of terrorism is dynamic and continuously changing; novel developments, due to constantly shifting geopolitical contexts, new technology advances, and changing strategies of the militants, may continue to alter the regional security landscape beyond the time scope addressed in this study. However, the application of several authoritative sources and internationally recognized sources, and by comparison analysis and methodological triangulation, results in the strengthening of the reliability and credibility of these research findings and the availability of the study itself.

Results and Discussion

Transformation of Pakistan's Terrorism Landscape after 2021

Information security for Pakistan as a whole and its cybersecurity has significantly changed since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in August 2021. Over the past ten years, Pakistan had made substantial efforts to lower its levels of terrorist violence, both through large-scale military operations and intelligence-led strikes and measures, as well as institutional reforms, but with the onset of 2021, terrorist violence in Pakistan has again become a more diffuse, adaptable, and technologically savvy feature of the country. As compared to earlier stages and the relative categorical centralization of insurgent groups operating in sanctuaries, the current phenomenon of terrorism in Pakistan is more decentralized, networked, and is able to leverage both the physical and digital domains. The change

in the militant organizational structure can perhaps be attributed to an expression of broader geopolitical developments as well as new technologies and changing regional dynamics of instability.

One of the salient features of today's security landscape in Pakistan is the renewed activities of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). As a result of the political changes in Afghanistan, the organization had an opportunity to reshuffle its leadership, make greater efforts in recruitment, build more operational networks, and increase its attacks across the border against Pakistani security forces. Meanwhile, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) has continued to be active; there has been a resurgence in sectarian conflict, and ethnology-nationalist insurgency in Balochistan has proliferated, making Pakistan's security picture a multidimensional one in which multiple extremist organizations operate with multiple ideological, political, and strategic goals. The militant landscape in Pakistan has undergone a fundamental shift from being a singular insurgency by a single movement to a system of different actors, merged into one, that have multiple organizational structures, multiple objectives relating to territory and the means of committing violence.

In addition, it seems that the operational nature of acts of terror has changed significantly. The militant groups have increasingly shunned territorial control and embraced flexible cells, precision strikes, well-timed ambushes, suicide bombers, and networks of communications that enable them to use technology. The use of digital platforms enables extremist groups to transfer financial funds, spread propaganda, recruit terror cells, collect intelligence, and coordinate operations across different countries, granting their organization resilience even while facing continued anti-terrorism pressure and thwarting. This shift from traditional insurgent tactics to those involving decentralized and nimble networks has made it more difficult to collect intelligence, predict threats, and prosecute via law enforcement operations against enemy sanctuary areas that are mainly geographic in concentration.

From a theoretical point of view, the process of change is an expression of various aspects in the current era of security. The military and border security, along with intelligence activities, are all important tools of state sovereignty whose role and relevance in Pakistan remain constant, and realism suggests these aspects must be enhanced against the ever-changing threats from both the internal and external fronts. Constructivism emphasizes the ongoing trajectory of ideologies, identity politics, and extremist rhetoric as support bases for nourishing militant recruitment in the face of organizational disturbances. As Human Security Theory has shown, gaps in good governance, socioeconomic inequality, political exclusion, low literacy, and poor access to public services are still factors that make people vulnerable to mobilization by extremist actors. Securitization Theory also helps us to understand that the revival of terrorism after 2021 has strengthened states' tendency to seek extraordinary security measures, institutional changes, and strengthening their intelligence capabilities towards addressing the growing hybrid threats.

The metamorphosis of the remains of Pakistan Terrorism is not just a boiler overheating its militants but a metamorphosis in the nature of contemporary Terrorism too. In fact, the overlapping of regional geopolitical turmoil, organization adaptation, digital technologies, and prevailing governance challenges has resulted in a dynamically evolving threat landscape which requires a non-soldiering solution. We need an integrated approach, a mix of effective security operations, institutional reform, technological modernization, socioeconomic development, community resilience and enhanced regional cooperation, to achieve sustainable counter terrorism. This situation of changing security environments helps in comprehending the upcoming technological changes and terrorist threats highlighted in the next section.

Emerging Terrorist Threats and Technological Transformation

In Pakistan, the diversification of militant groups and the fast adoption of new techniques in extremist activities have become the hallmark of terrorists. The security situation today is very different from previous stages of insurgency,

which were largely controlled by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and has a number of actors with varied ideologies, operational strengths, and strategic interests. The multi-faceted threat map of Balochistan due to TTP, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), sectarian extremist groups, and ethnology-nationalist insurgent organizations has made it difficult to counter the threat through traditional counter terrorism methods. This diversification has made the challenge of threat assessments a complex issue given that militant groups have the ability to evolve their methods, forge ad hoc alliances, leverage local grievances, and continue functioning through decentralized networks – both online and offline.

In all these, the TTP is the most important internal security threat in Pakistan due to its ability to adapt and strategize itself. The organization's operational structure has grown more decentralized and fragmented, recruitment comes more through local channels, and it allows for ongoing activity amid ongoing military pressure, and attacks have been increasingly directed against the security forces. At the same time, ISKP's influence has blossomed with its transnational ideological expansion via polished propaganda production, indoctrination of religious minorities, and luring militants from other organizations who are disaffected. These groups are more than coexisting, with the common thread of ongoing sectarian violence in Balochistan; the grammar of the overall situation in Pakistan is that there is no longer the same kind of insurgent movement; today there are fragmented groups with various and different goals, with sometimes overlapping motives.

Technological innovation has further revolutionized the ways and means of terrorist groups. Today, militant groups make use of encrypted messaging applications, social media platforms, artificial intelligence and cryptocurrencies, commercial drone technologies and cyber tools to recruit individuals and spread propaganda, plan activities, carry out financial transactions, and ensure secure communications. The Internet also allows far-flung ideological propaganda to spread quickly, extremists to recruit from new and broader geographic areas, and decentralized networks that are much harder for intelligence to track. AI can be used to improve targeted propaganda, streamline multilingual content creation, study audience behaviour, and create manipulated media and communications that can also shape opinion and radicalize individuals via digital means. Commercially available drones, for example, could give terrorists new opportunities for reconnaissance, surveillance, logistical support and possibly precision attacks against strategic targets, and cryptocurrencies and digital payment systems make it harder to monitor the flow of terrorist funds using traditional financial monitoring tools.

Traditional distinctions between physical and digital violence have also become somewhat blurred with the rise of cyber-enabled terrorism. A growing trend, spearheaded by militant groups, is to use not only conventional means of attack, but also misinformation, psychological operations, cyber-enabled fundraising, and the spread of radicalization through the online landscape to propagate their ideologies beyond immediate theaters of operation. This intersection of terrorism, cybercrime, organized crime, and information warfare represents the rise of "hybrid security threats," where digital technologies become more important in terms of power, durability, and geographical extent, in the fight against extremist organizations. Thus, the counter terrorism institutions are forced to increasingly deal with virtual worlds in which, in addition to the familiar face-to-face recruitment, the spread of ideology, the coordination of operations, and financial transactions take place in tandem.

The integrated theoretical framework used in this study can help to understand the evolution of the threat landscape. Realism can help to understand why Pakistan still takes primordial importance in the modernization of the army, strengthening intelligence agencies, and technological surveillance to safeguard national sovereignty in the face of ever-evolving security threats. Constructivism emphasizes the role of ideology, community socialization, and electronic communication in maintaining extremist recruitment and the legitimacy of online groups. Human Security Theory illustrates why technology alone cannot create terrorism; rather, it is constantly present governance

shortcomings, socioeconomic inequalities, political marginalization, and education inequality that yield fertile ground for radicalization. Securitization Theory can also offer insights into the growing securitisation of numerous issues, and the subsequent legitimization of institutionally wide-ranging changes, cybersecurity laws, digital surveillance capabilities, and inter-agency cooperation, thanks to the advent of cyber-enabled terrorism, artificial intelligence, and hybrid threats.

These are all signs of the future evolution of the counter terrorism picture in Pakistan, where technological dimensions are becoming more and more significant, as traditional modes of terrorism give way. Today, terrorist organizations can increasingly function in multi-layered and multi-modal ecosystems, leveraging the synergy between physical and digital spaces for greater adaptability and resilience in their operations. As such, Pakistan needs to modernize its intelligence structure and develop cyber capabilities, digital forensics, create regulation and oversight of emerging technologies, and strengthen regional and international cooperation in order to address this changing threat environment. These considerations create a platform for a discussion of the overall development of Pakistan's counter terrorism policy, its successes and its still existing institutional weaknesses in the next section.

Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Strategy

Achievements and Limitations

Pakistan's counter terrorism approach has changed a lot in the last 20 years from a response based on military forces to a more comprehensive one that involves intelligence, legislation, financial regulations, border control, and institutional coordination. The military operation had more success in destroying many militant sanctuaries, terrorist supply lines, and reestablishing government rule in regions where insurgents had controlled the situation. A series of such achievements significantly lowered the level and scale of terrorist attacks during the second half of the 2010s, and showed the operational readiness of the state to face organized militant violence. But the security landscape since 2021 has been altered, and it has become clear that mere military victories will not catalyse security and stability in the face of new and emerging extremist groups becoming more decentralized and adaptive.

The military operations Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad are still remembered as huge achievements in the campaign against terror in Pakistan. They greatly hindered the infrastructure of several extralegal military groups, including the destruction of operational hubs, elimination of arms caches, disruption of recruitment, and re-establishment of the authority of the central government in war-stricken areas. Intelligence-Based Operations (IBOs) also contributed to increasing the effectiveness of the operations, where information on the various militant cells was gathered and thus action was taken on the affected area without leaving room for massive collateral damage. All of this, in turn, significantly heightened the capacity of the Pakistani government to react quickly to new security challenges and created better collaboration among the military, intelligence and law-enforcement communities.

In 2014, the National Action Plan (NAP) came into existence as part of the first-ever comprehensive national counter terrorism action plan in Pakistan, marking a significant institutional leap. Unlike the earlier attempts that relied mainly on military measures, NAP gave rise to the phenomenon of Counter terrorism by deriving its notions from the fields of judicial reforms, financial intelligence, intelligence coordination, border security, countering hate speech, financial education, and countering the financing of extremists. Pakistan also improved compliance with international financial instructions by consolidating anti-money laundering laws and regulations, financial transaction monitoring, and strengthening terrorist financing prevention mechanisms. Border management was also further enhanced with the construction of a 2611 km long border fence between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and installation of biometric verification devices, which restricted militants' infiltration activities through open checking points.

Yet, a number of structural and institutional weaknesses, highlighted by current scholarship, remain that affect the effectiveness of Pakistan's counter terrorism strategy in the long term. A common issue is that policy improvements do not always happen in both federal and provincial institutions in the same manner. Military and intelligence structures have proved to be fairly successful in carrying out their roles, but not necessarily civilian law-enforcement agencies, judicial bodies, or local government systems. Problems with the overall effectiveness of national counter terrorism efforts continue, due to delays in judicial procedures, law enforcement of counter terrorism laws, limited modernization of police forces, and coordination challenges within institutions. Likewise, measures to control extremist messages, reform some aspects of religious education, improve rehabilitation efforts, and create all-encompassing counter-radicalization programs have been conducted inconsistently.

The fast-evolving scenario of technology has added new challenges for the Pakistan security institutions. Encrypted communication platforms, social media networks, artificial intelligence, cryptocurrencies, and cyber technologies have become tools used more and more frequently by terrorist organizations, allowing them to avoid being detected while ensuring operational resilience. Digital surveillance and cyber intelligence infrastructure in Pakistan has progressed somewhat, and generally the institutional changes lag behind technological developments. Thus, ongoing investments in artificial intelligence-supported intelligence analysis, cyber security, financial intelligence, and highly dedicated technical capabilities to handle more and more complex hybrid threats will be needed for future counter terrorism operations. There will therefore be a need to enhance cooperation amongst intelligence, cyber security institutions, financial regulators, and law-enforcement organizations to improve the effectiveness of operations in a changing world of digital security.

The integrated theoretical framework is an appropriate way to interpret the results of this study. Realism is the reason why defense, intelligence upgradation, and protection of borders have remained the key focus areas even after 75 years, as Pakistan continues to face threats from internal and external forces. Securitization Theory illustrates how, over time, terror has become a national security, possibly existential, problem for the nation, thus authorizing the introduction of novel laws, bureaucratic reorganizations and the expansion of intelligence capabilities. Thus, whilst military action is needed, Human Security Theory emphasizes important socioeconomic and governance factors that enable radicalizing elements to take root, such as poverty, exclusion from political structures, unequal access to education and poor public institutions. Constructivism also teaches that even in the face of advances in the operations of militant groups, extremist ideology and identity-based stories and digital propaganda are also in constant need of being attacked as a means for sustainable counter terrorism.

Pakistan's counter terrorism policy has had a significant operational success so far, yielding fewer offensive terrorists and a huge improvement in the security institutions of the country. However, the shift of terrorism to more electronically sophisticated, decentralized, and hybrid forms of violence illustrates that future effectiveness will require a combination of kinetic security operations, governance reforms, technological innovations, institutional modernization, preventive strategies, and community resiliency. Based on these observations, it is important to consider the broader governance and regional security dynamics, as well as long-term policy orientations, which might influence the future counter terrorism landscape in Pakistan as outlined in the subsequent section.

Governance, Regional Security, and Future Challenges

Operational security resiliency alone is not enough to ensure the sustainability of Pakistan's counter terrorism agenda; structural conditions that continue to enable violent extremism in the country also need to be addressed. Modern research has begun to note that a combination of governance deficits, socioeconomic inequalities, political instability, regional insecurity, and emerging technological threats promotes conditions that enable terrorism to continue.

Effective counter-terrorism thus necessitates a multiple governance approach which includes security institutions, political reform, economic development, social inclusion, and regional diplomacy. The fact that after significant military accomplishments, extremists are continuing to kill people shows that terrorism has become a form of governance and is no longer just a law-enforcement and military problem.

Governance is still one of the most important factors contributing to the lasting security situation. A lack of institutional capacity and corruption, irregular public service provision, restricted access to education and health services, unemployment and political disempowerment continue to provide breeding grounds for recruitment and ideological mobilization by extremist groups. Extremist narratives offering identity, protection, or economic opportunities are more likely to take root in communities where there is economic deprivation and limited State presence. Stable and effective local governance, greater participation in education, expansion of youth employment, judicial effectiveness, and increased trust in the state's institutions are thus fundamental to counter terrorism sustainability. In order to prevent radicalization, it is not only necessary to disrupt the creation and functioning of significant militant groups, but also to minimize their social attractiveness by eliminating structural weaknesses.

Pakistan's counter terrorism landscape is even more complicated by regional security dynamics. A security environment in Afghanistan that continues to directly affect the situation on the PAF border, coupled with cross-border movements, refugee flows, illicit trafficking and transnational extremist networks, continues to be a challenge. Meanwhile, the strategic aspects of Pakistan's national security policy have become more extensive due to the strategic competitors among regional powers, the changing security ties with the neighbouring countries and the support of critical economic projects like China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These trends show that there can be no distinction between the two, in terms of domestic counter terrorism and overall regional stability. Intelligence sharing, precursor control, joint border operations, diplomacy and multilateral military security cooperation will thus continue to be crucial for curbing trans-border extremism and consolidating peace in the region.

Spot the shape of future counter terrorism challenges in a new convergence of terrorist methods and dynamically changing technologies. Extremist organizations operate in a different context today: the use of artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, encrypted communication platforms, deep fakes, commercial drones and counterattacks, and cryptocurrency-based financial systems. The technologies help terrorist organizations recruit from abroad, share propaganda material more efficiently, stay away from the censorship of traditional security filters, and carry out decentralized operations more anonymously. Therefore, a continual process of modernization of both global intelligence and predictive analytics with cyber intelligence, artificial intelligence threat analysis, digital forensics, financial intelligence, and predictive analytics is required to be incorporated in the framework of counter terrorism in Pakistan's security institutions. The ability of institutions to adapt the "operating system" will be just as critical as its operating system in the face of growing hybrid threats of increasing sophistication.

This integrated theoretical approach is relevant in overcoming the aforementioned challenges. Realism also kicks in to continue supporting efforts to increase the readiness of the military forces, intelligence agencies, and, of course, the security of the border, in order to protect the sovereignty of the nation in an extremely volatile regional landscape. Human Security Theory underscores that conditions that lead to recruitment by extremists must be reduced and that sustainable peace requires betterment in human security through education, employment, social inclusion, effective governance, and economic development in an equitable way. Constructivism emphasises the need to refute the ideology-driven narratives, polarization based on identity, and digital propaganda, which help the perpetuation of extremist movements even when militarily defeated. Securitization Theory also demonstrates how governments continuously have to re-conceptualize their priorities of national security and create new institutions to face new

challenges which are not necessarily ones of armed violence but are at least as much a function of new technologies and hybrid threats.

The findings indicate that moving forward, Pakistan's future in combating terrorism will rely on striking a balance between short-term security needs and long-term institutional strength. Although continuing military operations and intelligence-led action will continue to be essential to interrupt active terrorist groups, investments in governance reform, technological modernization, economic opportunity, education, strategic communication, and community resilience are essential for sustainable peace. Also crucial is the fact that there is reinforcement of regional cooperation via intelligence sharing, coordinated governance of the borders, financial controls, cybersecurity cooperation, and diplomacy. When viewed as a whole, these measures form the basis for a comprehensive national security strategy which can tackle terror not only in its operational forms, but also in the conditions that continue to foster violent extremism in Pakistan.

Conclusion

Despite the gains that Pakistan has made over the last two decades by largely winning the war on terror and undertaking intelligence-based interventions, legal changes, and institutional modernization, Pakistan continues to face one of the biggest and toughest national security threats from terrorism. Pakistan has seen significant progress in curbing major acts of terrorism and combating large-scale acts of militant violence through extensive counter terrorist operations, but with 2021's political developments in Afghanistan, the security situation in Pakistan has drastically changed. Terrorism has shifted from a security issue driven mainly by a localized insurgency to a multidimensional and adaptive security threat with the resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), activities of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), and continuing ethno-nationalist insurgencies. This metamorphosis is an indication of the nature of modern-day terror and the pitfalls of combat elements alone.

From the results of this research, it can be deduced that the terrorist organizations in Pakistan have proven to be resilient in terms of organization, as they have taken many aspects of decentralization of command structure, enhanced links with cross-border countries, use of governance vulnerabilities, and also incorporated new technologies into their operations. Extremist groups have become much more flexible and transnational in their operations through the use of digital platforms, encrypted communication systems, cryptocurrencies, commercial drones, artificial intelligence, and propaganda via cyber technology. That means that today terror is no longer limited to the real world, and must be faced with a technologically sophisticated and forward-looking methodology that can effectively handle an ever-changing hybrid threat.

The paper also reveals that Pakistan's approach to combating terrorism has gone much beyond the traditionalist approach of combating terrorism through conventional military operations. The success of large-scale operations like Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad has been achieved whenever it has been required; terrorist incidents have been drastically reduced, state authority restored in conflict-impacted areas, and a large number of militant sanctuaries have been dismantled. The institutional step of integrating military operations with judicial reform, coordination of intelligence, financial regulation, border management, and a counter-extremist financing regime, with the initiation of the National Action Plan (NAP), was a significant development. A combination of better law enforcement, international financial norms, and improved border security has led to better institutional ability within Pakistan to deal with terrorism.

The analysis, however, demonstrates that there are also significant shortcomings in the current counter terrorism structure in Pakistan. While there have been significant enhancements in the capacity to operate on the ground,

ongoing governance weaknesses, social and economic inequalities, political instability, education gaps, and differential implementation of the rule of law offer chances to rally and recruit extremists. In addition, as technologies become more and more innovative at a fast pace, institutions are often faced with new challenges that are more difficult to adapt to than the technology itself. Hence, there is a necessity to strengthen civilian institutions, modernize intelligence capability, extend the cybersecurity infrastructure, develop digital forensics, and improve coordination among the military, law-enforcement, financial, and judicial forums.

The holistic theory used in this study comprehensively explains how and why Pakistan's terrorism landscape has been changing over the years. The realization of the importance of state preparedness, intelligence, and border security to safeguard state sovereignty from internal and external threats. Constructivism emphasizes how ideologies, identities, and extremist narratives remain critical to maintaining radicalization and group viability. Still, Human Security Theory is an expanded analysis because poverty, unemployment, governance issues, political exclusion, and lack of access to education and public services remain important structural causes of violent extremism. Securitization Theory has been used to account for the growing securitisation of terrorism as a threat whose nature is existential and therefore demands exceptional law, institutional and technological responses. Collectively, these theoretical outlets show that terrorism is today's issue is not only military but multifaceted and demands a comprehensive solution of political, economic, technological, and social dimensions.

The study also contributes to the existing literature in that it gives a detailed picture of the current terrorism situation in Pakistan after 2021. This study differs from previous research that largely concentrated on one militant group or a specific military operation by introducing into a single analytical set-up emerging technologies, hybrid security threats, governance issues, and regional geopolitical evolution, among other institutional aspects. The research highlighted the need to study the adaptation of militant organizations as well as the transformation of Pakistan's counter-terrorism (anti-terrorism) architecture to better understand terrorism as an evolving national security challenge in response to both domestic conditions of vulnerabilities and transnational developments.

Finally, long-term governance reforms, technological modernization, economic growth, education, and community resilience will be key components of counter terrorism in Pakistan that are both sustainable and effective. Whilst military action will continue to be necessary to break the ongoing terrorist organization, lasting peace needs to tackle structural approaches that allow extremism to continue. The cooperation of the region will be strengthened, intelligence sharing will be promoted, digital security will be raised, institutional coordination will be improved, and inclusive development will be invested to reduce the security risks in the future. Thus, a comprehensive national security strategy, comprising kinetic strengths and preventive governance and regional cooperation, is the most viable road map toward enhancing the national security, long-term peace, and resilience of Pakistan.

Policy Recommendations

The results of this study are proof that current terrorism in Pakistan demands a holistic counter terrorism strategy which should be non-spasmodic and must look into the future rather than responding conventionally through military operations. National security is primarily dependent on military operations and intelligence-led interventions to interrupt ongoing militant networks; however, governance, institutional resilience, technological capabilities, regional co-operation and socioeconomic development also contribute to sustainable national security. For this perspective, the following policy suggestions are made to strengthen the long-term strategy of counter terrorism in the case of Pakistan with a view to increasing the security of the country and region.

Pakistan must keep working towards increasing the level of integration in the country's counter terrorism mechanism with a focus on modernizing intelligence operations and promoting technological innovations in the

national security institutions. AI should be integrated into traditional counter-terrorism systems through intelligence analysis, predictive threat assessment, digital forensics, cyber security operations, biometric surveillance, and advanced data analytics. Improved information sharing, operational efficiency, and quick response to emerging threats should be achieved through greater institutional coordination between the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), intelligence agencies, provincial Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs), law-enforcement bodies, financial regulators, and judicial institutions. This accompaniment should take the form of ongoing professional training and investments in technological expertise so security institutions can continue to deal with the growing range of hybrid threats.

To achieve long-term results, the conditions that make it easy to recruit and radicalize extremists must also be tackled. Priorities for governments should be focused on public institutions, good government, transparency in administration, an efficient judiciary system, educational system reform, and enhanced public services and healthcare in remote areas. Socioeconomic vulnerabilities often used by extremist organizations can be minimized through investments in youth employment, vocational training, entrepreneurship, and regional economic development. Community-based resilience-building initiatives, which engage with community leaders, teachers, religious experts, civil society groups, and media outlets, should be expanded to effectively rebut extremist messages, foster social cohesion and create greater trust in the democratic process.

The counter-radicalization measures should now play a key role in Pakistan's national security strategy. Policymakers should invest in comprehensive and holistic preventive programs designed to educate against and provide counter-narratives to extremist narratives through digital literacy and strategic communication, and not just focus on security operations. Education syllabuses must promote critical thinking and the development of citizens' conscience and other constitutional values; they must also provide fewer chances for ideological manipulation and promote tolerance toward other religions. At the same time, cooperation between government bodies, tech firms, academia and civil society should be enhanced in combating online extremist material and disrupting online recruitment networks, and on sensibly using new technologies without transgressing upon free speech rights and fundamental freedoms.

In view of the convergence of technology and terrorism, Pakistan should have an umbrella program for the strategy against cyber-enabled extremism at the national level. Increased focus on specialized cyber security units that can track encrypted communications, cryptocurrency transactions, artificial intelligence-helped propaganda, deepfake technologies, and threats from drones. Financial intelligence units, cyber security agencies, telecommunications regulators, and international technology partners could work more closely together to reach the capacity to identify new cyber threats before they become threats in real life. Cyber security infrastructure investment, research, and innovations should therefore be a part of the national security strategy in Pakistan, which should be done regularly.

Regional cooperation is key for sustainable counter terrorism. Intelligence sharing, coordinated border management and diplomacy should continue to be strengthened between Pakistan and Afghanistan to minimize cross-border movement of militants and for better operational cooperation. In terms of regional cooperation at the wider regional level, cooperation with neighbouring countries and international organizations should center around the fight against the financing of terrorism, the trafficking of persons, cyber-enabled extremism and transnational organized crime. It is important to increase participation in platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the United Nations, and monitoring mechanisms to enhance the multilateral reaction to the changing regional security risks and facilitate regional stakeholders' trust and cooperation between the institutions.

Above all, Pakistan needs a full-fledged national security policy, which should combine kinetic counter terrorism with long-lasting governance reforms, technological modernization, economic inclusion, and human security. Moreover, in addition to the combat against and elimination of militant organizations, ensuring bolstering of institutional resilience, enhancing public trust, creating economic opportunities, and lessening the structural roots of violent extremism are essential for future counter terrorism success. To combat Pakistan's changing terrorism nemesis while securing an enduring peace, national resilience and regional stability in a growing complex world of global security, a multidimensional matrix of security, governance, technology, diplomacy and sustainable development policies is the most realistic option.

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