

# Fighting Terrorism – An Uphill Task

*“Average operational competence with superb strategic vision is better than superb operational competence but average strategic vision.”*



## ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR GOVERNANCE RESEARCH (CGR)

CGR is a forum for studies and debate on strategic and tactical issues related with good governance and the rule of law. It is a non-governmental civil society advocacy Centre dedicated to reforms in the justice and governance sectors.

As an independent think tank, CGR sets its own agenda, publishing and disseminating its findings regularly for national and global audience. Using an interdisciplinary approach, CGR brings together rule of law, justice and governance experts, researchers and internationally renowned professionals to animate its debate and research activities.

CGR aims to stand out as one of rare Pakistani think tanks to position itself at the very heart of debate on governance and justice issues.

CGR focuses on advocacy, research and studies in the following areas:

- Governance and Rule of Law
- Public Policy
- Policing and Justice Sectors
- Serious and Organized Crimes
- Counterterrorism and Counter Extremism (CT and CE)

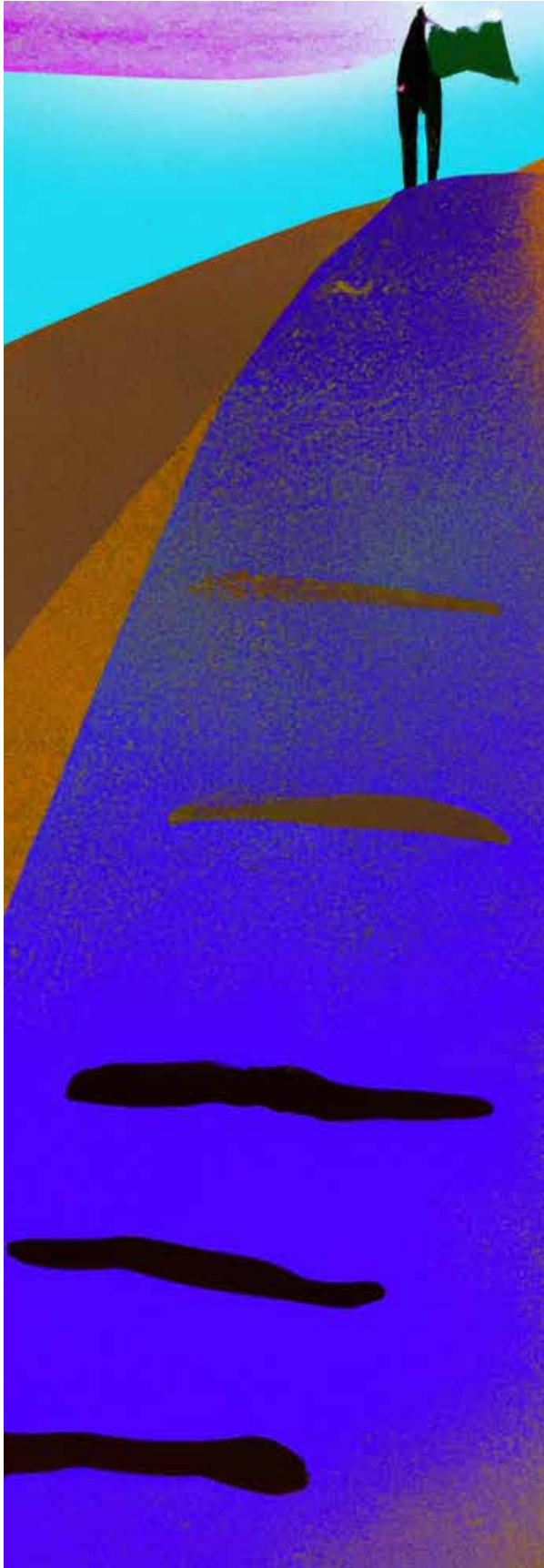
Meanwhile, the National Initiative against Organized Crime (NIOC) continues as a flagship project from the platform of the Centre for Governance Research (CGR).

\*\*\*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CGR would like to acknowledge that this Position Paper has been written by NIOC Consultant Dr Syed Kaleem Imam.

18 February 2023



## Position Paper

# Fighting Terrorism – An Uphill Task

*“Average operational competence with superb strategic vision is better than superb operational competence but average strategic vision.”*

## Introduction

It will be very naïve to say, it wasn't expected. The recent series of terrorist attacks on law enforcement agencies in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhawa (KP) and a suicide bomber blowing himself up in Islamabad had heralded that something sinister was in the offing. A masjid in the heavily protected environment of the police lines, housing many high-profile security offices was blown off on 30th January 2023 by a suicide bomber right at the time of prayers, killing over hundred worshippers, mostly police officers and maiming around many more.

It should be graciously accepted - a colossal intelligence failure and a security lapse. How he managed to enter is still being investigated. According to the IGP KP, the technical evidence and intelligence reports suggested that the bombing was carried out by the banned TTP-its Jamiatul Ahrar (JUA) faction. Earlier, JUA had claimed responsibility for the blast, terming as their revenge against the killing of their leader Omar Khalid Khorasani in August 2022 in the Paktika province of Afghanistan. They blamed Pakistan intelligence agencies for his killing. The deadly incident is a stark reminder of the

attack on APS School in 2016 that killed 153 innocent school children.

### Background

Pakistan was unfortunate to be dragged into a conflict with the Taliban for no reason of its own, even though its stakeholders viewed it as an opportunity to resolve its long-standing border dispute with neighboring Afghanistan. First, in the year 1979, they sided with the Western powers to oust the Soviets. As a result of the infamous September 11, 2001, attack on the Twin Towers, Pakistan was forced to assist the US- led forces in invading Afghanistan.

Ironically, the same Mujahedeen who were trained by the Pakistan and the US forces to drive out the Soviets had turned into the Taliban and this time they were the target of the same powers with whom they had fought the war earlier. During the Hamid Karzai - Ashraf Ghani's regime in Kabul, Pakistan continued to have turbulent borders as the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) were a bone in the throat. They carried out their terrorist activities and would hide in Afghanistan taking advantage of the porous and hard-to-guard borders. To curb this menace, Pakistan started to fence the border costing heavy expenditure, resources, and the lives of its soldiers.

As the Pakistan military intelligentsia and the right-wingers continued to have cordial relations with the Afghan Taliban (TTA), they hoped to have a cool Western border when TTA regained control of Kabul in August 2021. They also hoped to have TTA support to rein in the TTP. But to surprise, the TTA not only provided safe sanctuaries to TTP (Though TTA denies it) but also refused to accept the internationally accepted international borders,

commonly known as the Durand Line.

The situation worsened when the “regime change operation” in Pakistan resulted in a political disability and an economical debacle. While the government and establishment were focused to handle the internal situation, the terrorists were left with a loose hand. The TTP took advantage of the situation. They were already enjoying the benefits of previous government - military led peace deals. If on the one hand, they cunningly capitalized on the situation to their advantage, it exposes many fault lines in the government ranks.

### The Fault Lines

Before pointing fingers at others, let's look inward. We may find a few reasons for the surge of terrorism as well as the lack of capacity to quell them. Pakistan had good relations with the Taliban-led Afghan regime (1996- 2001) to the extent that it was one of the three countries besides the UAE and Saudi Arabia to have diplomatic ties with them.

When the US and British invaded Afghanistan in 2001, Pakistan not only severed its ties but also handed over many Taliban, including the Afghan ambassador to the US for putting them into Guantanamo prison. The treatment meted out to the ambassador was against international rules and ethics. The inhuman treatment the prisoner went through in the infamous jail sowed a seed of hatred in the Taliban against Pakistan.

As the time passed, later in 2003, the Taliban shura (also known as the Quetta shura) revived, regrouped and conducted operations against U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan (Khan, 2009). Thus Pakistan was accused running with the hare and hunting with the hounds: claiming to

back U.S.-led efforts in Afghanistan even as it fully backed the Afghan Taliban cause against those forces.

Following the NATO troop's abrupt withdrawal from Afghanistan, its adverse fallout was expected. In an effort to secure its peaceful environment as well as preempt TTP's expected misadventure, Pakistan initiated peace efforts with the latter. The Afghan Taliban also insisted that Pakistan reach a negotiated settlement with the TTP. In a bid to regain confidence, reportedly, Pakistan also released 100 hardened criminals from its prisons (Desk, 2021). As the Taliban were always the hardliners, the talks were moving at a slow pace.

In negotiations, appeasement was preferred over upholding the rule of law. They were granted safe passage to settle peacefully and lay down their arms, but instead, it only served as a launching pad for their criminal activity. In a major development the political scenario in Pakistan changed abruptly and the policy of not allowing Pakistan's space for any transnational activity quietly went dormant. An Al Qaeda top leader Ayman Al Zawahiri was killed in a US drone attack on 30th July 2022 in Afghanistan. Though denied by Pakistan having allowed its air space for such an attack, Afghanistan blamed Pakistan for allowing its air space and relations soared frustrating peace talks (Gul, 2022).

Earlier, in the year 2004, the Army high command negotiated a deal with Pakistan Taliban leader Nek Muhammad in South Waziristan but soon after the deal, he was killed in a drone attack sabotaging the peace deal (Nek Mohammed, 2006). Similarly, Pakistan also reached an agreement with TTP leader Baitullah Mehsood in 2005. The peace deal with

him also broke. Later, he (Mehsood) confessed to having attacked many law enforcement setups in Pakistan. He was also killed in a drone attack in Aug 2009 (Obituary, 2010). The dichotomy of signing peace of deals and killing frustrated confidence at both ends.

At Pakistan's end, there always appears an ad hoc policy and lack of a clear line of action. Twenty-point National Action Plan (NAP) was prepared hurriedly after the tragic incident of 16th Dec 2014 and approved by the parliament on 24th December 2014 (National Action Plan, 2014). Many of the agenda points were not given due consideration. The emphasis remained on knee-jerk actions. Non-kinetic measures did not receive any attention.

After the merger of the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA), the newly merged districts remained neglected. The priority should have been the development of infrastructure, education, and health. Contrary to that, in the federal budget for fiscal year 2022-2023, the government slashed it from 54 billion to Rs. 38 billion paving the way for the militants to exploit it in their favor, (A. A. Shah, 2022).

In Pakistan, the foreign policy lacks a clear direction or treads on unknown ground. Afghanistan is a reality that must be reckoned with and a cordial relation with them should be the priority. However, confidence and willingness to resolve the impediments are invisible on both sides.

### **The Next Line of Action**

There appears to be a lack of communication and a lack of confidence between the Army and the civil government in dealing with the Taliban. They had been negotiating and making



peace deals with the TTP whereas the previous political governments (less Imran Khan Government) were conveyed the outcome only. Seemingly, the present political regime is either ineffective against terrorism or their energies are being consumed against political rivals. The prudence demands that the legislators should take the lead in handling the situation politically.

Agreed that the dialogue would be the ultimate solution, the negotiations with the criminals disguised as religious devotees and claiming to establish their brand of sharia must be denied. Those who have been found behind the loss of hundreds of innocent lives, should first be chased and annihilated and thereafter only those who agree to lay their arms should be welcomed to sit on the table.

Use of force is not the only solution, it should be augmented with uplifting of area administratively and strengthening the political environment. The disgruntled lot has almost no support in the public as evident from the recent marches against them. Under the present circumstances, the role of intelligence agencies increase manifold. There may not be requirement of any operation if evil is nipped in the bud. We must not forget that they are our own people, and they do have some sympathizers among us. Terrorism takes its root from extremism. The need is to address the root cause. The madrasahs spread radicalism. Very few impart religious and worldly knowledge simultaneously. The need is to revive the government school system for a moderate upbringing

Community policing along with the local moderate religious leaders can play an effective

role. Barring few hardliners, a sizeable among them would like to live a peaceful life. However, any effort to establish their brand of sharia must be handled ruthlessly. Killing terrorism is most important than killing terrorists. All actions against extremists should be across the board. No good cop – bad cop technique. There are no good or bad Taliban, however, it must be borne in mind that the Taliban have been divided into many factions – groups. The one claiming the responsibility of attack on Masjid on 30th January is a faction of TTP. For every crime, the criminal must be given fair chance to defend but the justice must be imparted in days - should not linger for months or years.

Police which is the premier security organization of the country should take a lead role in countering terrorism. Is it not strange that the police have no representation in the National Security Committee? Whereas, all the services chiefs are its members. Police have Counter Terrorism Departments (CTD) in all provinces. Let them be assertive, assume responsibility, and take the shot.

The National Police Management Board (NPMB), comprised of police chiefs, must be revitalized. After every terrorist's action and the counteraction, the whole scenario leading to the situation be reviewed thoroughly for lessons learned. If anything goes wrong, it should not be hushed under the carpet. The police, NACTA, Intelligence agencies and Army must be accountable to parliament and present their six-monthly progress report to justify the expenditure being incurred on them.

## Conclusion

The Afghan and Pakistani Taliban are sharp,

have a strong ideology, and the same lineage. The Afghans are under the influence of having defeated two superpowers and think that they can throw away any authority who comes in their way. The Pakistani Taliban did provide them moral as well as physical support in their pursuit for Kabul. The terrorists and the criminals in the ranks of Taliban find safe havens in Afghanistan. Back home, the political and economic situation is in the doldrums. The time is ripe for a clear, concise, and pragmatic policy. In order to advance, Pakistan must look after its interests, not of others.

## Bottomline

The time has come for us to adhere to our national security policies and national action plans. We need professionalism and leadership now more than ever. It is time we stop interfering with the due process of law. It is imperative that state institutions be given operational autonomy and be held accountable for their actions. Protests in KP are a clear

indication that Pakistanis want peace and want to know what plans the government has to stop violence. Implementation of these plans is urgently needed.

## References

Desk, N. (2021, November 23). *More Than 100 TTP Prisoners Released By Govt As “Goodwill Gesture”*: Report. *The Friday Times - Naya Daur*. <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/2021/11/23/more-than-100-ttp-prisoners-released-by-govt-as-goodwill-gesture-report/>

Khan, M. A. (2009). *Quetta: The Headquarters of the Afghan Taliban*. . . Vol, 2(5).

Nek Mohammed. (2006, October 3). <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/taliban/militants/mohammed.html>

Obituary: Baitullah Mehsud. (2010, January 9). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2010/1/9/obituary-baitullah-mehsud>





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Syed Kaleem Imam holds a PhD in Politics and International Relations, an LLM degree in Human Rights Law from SOAS, UK, and an LLB and

master's degree in Philosophy. He shares his understanding and research regularly at various training institutes and public forums, as well as in print and electronic media. He is the author of several publications both nationally and internationally. A 33-year career of exemplary service characterized his career. A former police officer and Federal Secretary of the Narcotics Control Ministry, he is a civil servant with extensive experience in the field. His national experience includes serving as SSP in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Quetta, Sibi and Nasirabad; Additional Director Immigration, Chief Security Officer to the Prime Minister, Deputy Director General, Intelligence Bureau, Director of National Public Safety Commission; Inspector General Islamabad, Punjab, Sindh, and National Highways and Motorways twice. During his time with the United Nations, he served as Chief of Operations in Mozambique, Planning Coordinator in Liberia, and UN Police Commissioner in Darfur, Sudan. He has been decorated with three UN peace medals, the Quaid Azam Police Medal, the President's Police Medal, and the Tamagha-i-Imtiaz for national distinguished service. He is well-known as an academician, a security analyst, a strategist, and a policy practitioner.



## CENTRE for GOVERNANCE RESEARCH PAKISTAN



[www.cgr.com.pk](http://www.cgr.com.pk)



CgrPakistan



CgrPakistan

### Islamabad office:

#38-W, Khalid Plaza, 1st. Floor. Jinnah Ave. Blue Area. Islamabad Phones 051-2870852 & 2870853.

### Lahore office:

22, Tipu Block, New Garden Town, Lahore  
Phone: 042-35831352