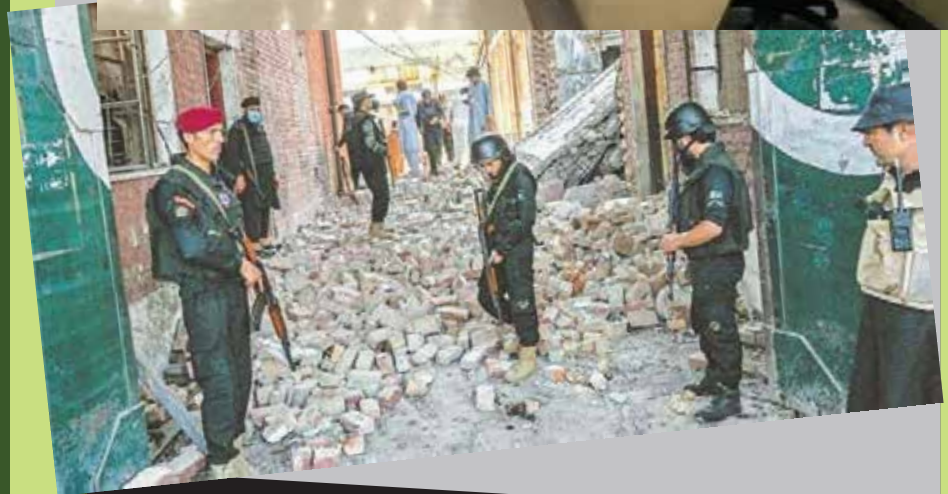


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CGR-NIOC is fully engaged in the process of UNTOC Review in Pakistan. Our advocacy, interest taken by the National Focal Person and the Federal Investigation Agency resulted in ratification of UNTOC Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.



# Director's Message

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The first half of the year 2023 kept us busy in our professional endeavours. Many policy briefs and position papers were written on different categories of Organised Crime in Pakistan.

CGR-NIOC is fully engaged in the process of UNTOC Review in Pakistan. Our advocacy, interest taken by the National Focal Person and the Federal Investigation Agency resulted in ratification of UNTOC Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.

We value our partnership with Geneva-based Global Initiative Against Organized Crime (GITOC) in taking up many causes in furtherance of our objectives to deal with serious and organised crimes.

CGR-NIOC have actively participated in the UNODC-sponsored UNTOC Constructive Dialogues on Arms Trafficking and Technical Assistance.

Our mission is to strive for excellence and make a difference. It is a continuing hard work made possible due to excellent team spirit.

**TARIQ KHOSA**

Director CGR

## 4 security personnel martyred after checkpoints in Balochistan's Sherani come under attack

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**Three police officials and a Frontier Constabulary (FC) personnel were martyred while a terrorist was killed after police and Levies checkpoints in the Dhana Sar area of Balochistan's Sherani subdistrict came under attack.**

Sherani Deputy Commissioner (DC) Bilal Shabbir confirmed the fatalities to Dawn.com, adding that the exchange of fire between the security forces and the terrorists continued for almost two hours.

He said another FC personnel was injured, whose condition was out of danger. A terrorist was killed during the exchange of fire, while two others were injured.

DC Shabbir added: "The companions of the injured terrorists succeeded in taking them away. The body of the dead terrorist has been handed over to the CTD (Counter-Terrorism Department).

He further said that the bodies of the martyrs have been taken to Zhob District Headquarters Hospital.

Stating that law enforcement agencies have cordoned off Dhana Sar and the surrounding areas, the DC added that the CTD has collected evidence from the incident's site and has initiated its probe.

Meanwhile, Sherani District Health Officer Dr Daulat Khan told Dawn.com that a state of emergency has been put in place at the Zhob Civil Hospital and that all hospital staff had been called to duty despite the weekend.

He confirmed that one body has been shifted to the hospital.

### **Condemnations**

Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo condemned the "rocket attack and firing" on the checkpoints and expressed his grief on the martyrdom of the four security personnel.

He also lauded the police's and the FC's efforts in killing one terrorist. "The terrorists cannot demoralise the security forces by their cowardly actions," he said in a statement.

“The sacrifices of the security forces are a beacon for the nation. The security forces are ensuring the security of the country and the nation with their firm determination and courage,” Bizenjo added.

He went on to assert that the nation was “standing with its security forces in thwarting the evil intentions of anti-nation elements”. The chief minister also prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured personnel.

In a separate statement, Balochistan Governor Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar said all available resources should be used to bring those who were spreading terror in the society and sabotaging peace in the province.

“We have to show national unity and consensus to thwart the evil intentions of terrorists and saboteurs,” he said.

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari also strongly condemned the terrorist attack. He said he was equally aggrieved at the deaths of the security personnel as were their families.

“Cowardly terrorists can neither discourage us nor our soldiers with such attacks,” FM Bilawal said, adding that he saluted all the martyrs of the country.



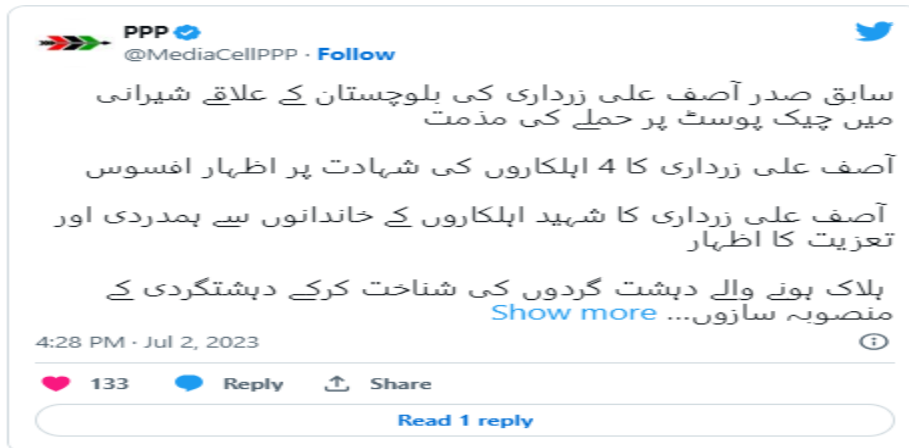
National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf and Deputy Speaker Zahid Akram Durrani also condemned the incident and expressed condolences over the deaths of the security personnel.

They asserted that the “cowardly acts” of terrorists could not weaken the morale of the nation and the security forces.



In a statement issued by the PPP Media Cell, former president Asif Ali Zardari expressed sympathy with the families of the martyred officers.

He demanded that the terrorists should be identified and brought to justice. "The nation will not forgive the killers of its brave sons at any cost," Zardari added.



Climate Change Minister Sherry Rehman also extended condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for the departed souls.

"Terrorists should know that Pakistan will keep defeating them," she added.

### Increase in terror attacks

Pakistan has seen an uptick in terror activities, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, after the outlawed TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

A day ago, a police constable was injured in a hand grenade attack at the "smart" police station of Quetta.

On June 24, a police official was martyred and two more were injured in a suicide attack on a police van in Balochistan's Turbat.

A month ago, two soldiers were martyred when terrorists attacked a security forces' checkpoint in the Singwan area of Balochistan's Kech district along the Pakistan-Iran border.

In a press conference last week, Inter-Services Public Relations Director General Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said that the security forces conducted 13,619 intelligence operations this year in which 1,172 terrorists were killed or arrested.

"On a daily basis, over 77 operations are being carried out by armed forces, police, intelligence agencies, and other law enforcement agencies to rid of the menace of terrorism," he said.

DG Sharif added that 95 soldiers embraced martyrdom in these operations.

Source: **DAWN JULY 2, 2023**

## 3 terrorists killed in intelligence-based operation in Dera Ismail Khan

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Three terrorists have been killed in an intelligence-based operation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan district, state broadcaster Radio Pakistan quoted the military's media affairs wing.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the terrorists.

It said the slain terrorists remained actively involved in various terrorist activities against security forces, police, and innocent civilians.

They were also "highly wanted for conducting a raid on a police check post in Kulachi on April 11, 2022, which resulted in the martyrdom of five brave police constables", the statement said.

The ISPR added sanitisation of the area was being carried out to eliminate any terrorists found in the area, adding that the security forces of Pakistan "are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism".

The Dera Ismail Khan operation comes amid a surge in terrorist activities across the country, especially in KP and Balochistan, since the outlawed militant group Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan ended its ceasefire with the government in November.

Earlier today, three police officials and a Frontier Constabulary (FC) personnel were martyred after police and Levies checkposts in the Dhana Sar area of Balochistan's Sherani subdistrict came under attack.

Officials said the exchange of fire between the security forces and the terrorists continued for almost two hours in which a terrorist was also gunned down.

A day ago, a police constable was injured in a hand grenade attack at the "smart" police station of Quetta.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 2, 2023

# Meeting challenges

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MUHAMMAD AMIR RANA

**PAKISTAN has been successful in pulling off a staff-level deal with the International Monetary Fund and securing a \$3 billion stand-by arrangement. Pending approval by the IMF board in July, this pact is expected to provide immediate respite to Pakistan's acute balance-of-payments crisis and serve as a platform for opportunities for further financial support from multilateral and bilateral partners.**

Reaching an agreement with the IMF was no piece of cake, as it required extensive political capital from both the civil and military leadership. Undeterred, they embarked upon a relentless diplomatic campaign in major capitals of friendly nations. However, this victory is not the end; it merely marks the beginning of another arduous undertaking – securing additional financial assistance from these friendly countries. Their demands are known, and include issues related to security and terrorism.

As Pakistan emerges from the shadow of adversity, one recalls that last year, it had successfully met another formidable challenge: getting off the menacing 'grey list' of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). This achievement was the product of years of dogged determination and persistent efforts to convince the international community of its strong commitment to tightening its monetary regulations in order to prevent exploitation by terrorists and criminals.

These milestones can be seen against the backdrop of the Indian prime minister's recent visit to the US, where discussions between US President Joe Biden and Narendra Modi led to a joint statement condemning cross-border terrorism and urging the FATF to enhance its anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing standards. It was aimed at Pakistan which swiftly issued an official demarche to the US envoy in Islamabad.

The strategic community in Islamabad believes that the US and its allies are employing the IMF and FATF as geopolitical tools. This perception is further bolstered by the view that Pakistan's close strategic proximity to China and its role in Afghanistan make it an unfortunate target of coercive politics, with India emerging as the principal beneficiary.

While acknowledging the existence of such geopolitical factors, it is essential to avoid falling into the trap of victimhood that saps the nation's energy and compromises its ability to stay the course. Externalising the issue will not yield a solution. Economists and security experts have long warned of the looming economic crisis and the ramifications of leniency towards any militant group in the country. When the consequences of policies are well known, clinging to the status



quo, without making the necessary course correction, would leave little room for justifiable complaints.

Pakistan now stands at a critical juncture where it must harness its resilience and determination to not only navigate the challenges imposed by global politics but also take transformative measures to ensure long-term solutions.

The allegation of militants infiltrating India-held Kashmir from Pakistan lacks substance. Pakistan has successfully subdued militant groups in compliance with FATF. Major groups, like the Jamaatud Dawa and Lashkar-e-Taiba, are having an internal debate but are unwilling to go public with it due to their mistrust of and fear of exploitation by India. Friendly nations also have concerns about militant groups and extremism in Pakistan.

The way out for Pakistan is obvious. The institutions should focus on countering terrorism financing and fulfilling international obligations. Efforts to neutralise the militant infrastructure should prioritise core national interests – and any temptation to use them for internal politics must be avoided. Pakistan has established mechanisms to check the illicit financial flows under FATF compliance. Effective oversight from parliament and legislative cover will increase legitimacy and gain international trust.

In the grand tapestry of global affairs, the presence of strong institutions to combat illicit financing is not merely a matter of international trust, but a crucial factor in maintaining geopolitical equilibrium. Recognising the significance of this paradigm, Pakistan must strategically position itself as a member of esteemed international bodies, such as the FATF, to bolster its influence on the geopolitical stage.

Becoming a FATF member calls for heightened responsibility. A few nations currently find themselves on the FATF's grey list, and are subject to scrutiny by this international watchdog. However, for Pakistan, membership promises to arm it with the necessary tools to deftly navigate the intricate web of diplomatic and political challenges thrust upon it by formidable forces such as India, the US and others.

To secure this coveted position within the FATF, Pakistan has earnestly attempted to meet the watchdog body's stringent criteria and elevate its standards. The FATF places particular emphasis on fostering transparency, understanding beneficial ownership, and ensuring that criminals are unable to conceal their nefarious activities behind a veil of opaque corporate structures.

In the journey towards membership, Pakistan's inclusion lies in the hands of member countries engaged in the intricate process of mutual evaluation. It is within this evaluative framework that the final verdict will be rendered, determining Pakistan's destiny in the ranks of the world's foremost financial warriors.

However, lurking in Pakistan's geopolitical landscape is a formidable challenge, one that tarnishes its global image and threatens its strategic interests. This challenge emanates from the terrorist groups operating across the Afghan border.

Even as Pakistan navigates the complex web of relations with the Afghan Taliban regime, the nation steadfastly supports its regime. On the other side, the Taliban, in their unwavering stance, continue to lend support to the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan. Rumours of resettlement initiatives for families of TTP fighters may echo in distant lands, but the reality is that any such endeavour would only augment the TTP's sinister capacity for terror. In the absence of fear that had resulted from the relentless retaliatory strikes by Pakistan previously, the TTP grows bolder, its actions unchecked, and its violence unrestrained as it casts aside all considerations for the collateral damage that might befall its kin.

The TTP is sowing chaos and seeks to line its pockets through extortion and other illicit means. In the quest for geopolitical equilibrium and the coveted membership of the FATF, Pakistan has to review its counterterrorism policies.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 2, 2023**

# Detering migrant smuggling

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TARIQ KHOSA

THE recent drowning of some 300 Pakistanis off the Greek coast, in their attempt to illegally reach Italy, is a national tragedy. This was the third such major incident since February. Keeping in view the UN Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants, 2000, and factors peculiar to Pakistan, a group of independent experts has drafted a 14-point National Action Plan Against Migrant Smuggling (NAPAMS) under the National Initiative against Organised Crime (NIOC) and launched by the Centre of Governance Research (CGR).

**Political ownership:** The most important step in combating migrant smuggling from Pakistan is to have political ownership of NAPAMS, without which it would be a nonstarter, as it requires migrant smuggling-specific legislation, provision of adequate resources and greater coordination between government departments. NAPAMS should have the federal cabinet's approval.

**Threat assessment:** Prescribing long- and short-term measures to combat migrant smuggling has to be preceded by an evidence-based threat assessment. Understanding the dynamics of migrant smuggling, substantiated by data, is essential to be better able to respond.

**Awareness:** Human smugglers take advantage of people's lack of awareness about the illegal, risky nature of migrant smuggling. A well-thought-out awareness campaign, tailored to the respective victim audiences, may be designed and implemented on a sustained basis.

**Prosecution:** In Pakistan, prosecution of migrant smuggler networks is a weak area in the enforcement of anti-migrant smuggling laws. A holistic performance audit is needed of the existing law (Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Act [PSMA], 2018) and enforcement mechanisms against migrant smuggling, including the enforcers (FIA, Coast Guards, FC/Rangers), prosecutors, courts, witness protection, rehabilitation of victims, etc. Based on this, the needed changes may be made to existing laws and the criminal justice system.

**Victim protection:** Migrants who get caught should be treated as victims, as visualised in the UNTOC Protocol on Smuggling of Migrants. Efforts should be made to rehabilitate them, as laid down in PSMA 2018.

**Witness protection:** Migrant smuggling is carried out by powerful, organised criminal groups. Witnesses are reluctant to come forward to give evidence. This requires an effective witness protection programme in major migrant smuggling cases.

**Anti-money laundering:** Migrant smugglers, like others of their ilk, must launder their profits. Financial investigations of all migrant smuggling networks must be carried out. This requires the strict application of the Anti-Money Laundering Act, 2010, and integrating the provisions of AMLA 2010 with those of PSMA 2018.

**Anti-corruption:** Migrant smuggling is difficult to carry out without government employees' corruption. All employees in FIA, Coast Guards, etc found involved must be given exemplary punishment. The law's anti-corruption provisions should be integrated into PSMA 2018.

**Socioeconomic measures:** The primary driver of victims of migrant smuggling is poverty and joblessness. Also it seems that victims belong to specific areas; for instance, it seems that around 90 per cent of victims of migrant smuggling going to Europe via the Iran-Turkey route belong to Gujranwala Division and some areas in AJK – places from where many have gone abroad earlier, and who serve as magnets for their families, friends and acquaintances. Poorer victims tend to cross over from Pakistan into Iran via Balochistan and from there sail to Oman, travelling onwards by foot to Dubai. The rates of migrant smugglers for this route are lower. Most of these victims belong to parts of KP, Sindh and south Punjab districts. These areas need to be identified, with more targeted steps taken to improve employment prospects.

**Legal employment abroad:** It is believed that since the legal ways of emigration are difficult, people resort to illegal ways to reach greener pastures. The performance of the Emigration Protection Bureau and the procedures to allow people to go abroad for employment must be evaluated

**Border control:** Effective border control is an essential component of combating human smuggling: FIA for airports, Coast Guard for sea routes and FC/ Rangers for land exits. A holistic exercise should be carried out to evaluate their requirements in terms of capacity building and a three-year plan launched to meet these. This step should be accompanied by better monitoring of their performance and ruthless accountability of those involved in migrant smuggling.

**International cooperation:** Unless all the concerned countries – of origin, transit and destination – cooperate, the effort against migrant smuggling is unlikely to succeed. Regional cooperation is required to deal with specific areas of human smuggling. For instance, to deal with human smuggling from Afghanistan/ Pakistan to Europe via land, a regional group of four countries like Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Greece can be formed. A quadrilateral group to deal with human smuggling comprising Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Greece, was set up in 2006. It had one meeting in Athens, followed by one in Islamabad, but then withered away. It must be revived.

Similarly, to deal with human smuggling by sea from Pakistan to Oman onwards to Dubai, another four-nation group may be formed comprising Pakistan, Iran, Oman and UAE. Previously, smuggling of child camel jockeys from Pakistan to UAE, was successfully combated by a joint effort by UAE and Pakistan. While in Pakistan FIA stepped up action against smugglers

who sent these kids abroad, UAE clamped down on those of its citizens who used them as jockeys, thus reducing demand.

**Implementation & monitoring:** Specific implementation plans should be drawn up on each of the measures mentioned, by a national steering committee led by the interior minister, with members from the finance and law ministries. They can co-opt any other members they consider appropriate. Any department not taking it seriously should be brought to the notice of the PM. Under the committee, the NSC should be a joint task force headed by the FIA, with Coast Guards and FC Balochistan as members. A joint task force should monitor NAPAMS' implementation monthly.

**Review:** The plan shall be reviewed after a year of implementation in light of feedback received from the relevant quarters and adjusted accordingly.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 3, 2023**

## Major martyred during gun battle with terrorists in Khyber district

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This image shows Major Mian Abdullah Shah, who was martyred during a gun battle with terrorists in Khyber.

**A Pakistan Army major was martyred during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Khyber tribal district's Shakhas area, the military's media affairs wing said.**

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that security forces had conducted an IBO last night after receiving reports about the presence of terrorists.

The ISPR said that while security forces were trying to establish "blocking positions to cut [off] the escape routes of [the] terrorists", a party of terrorists was spotted by Major Mian Abdullah Shah – who was "leading the operation from the front".

It said that the 33-year-old major, a resident of Kohat, embraced martyrdom as a result of a heavy exchange of fire.

"Three terrorists and their facilitators were apprehended. Sanitisation of the area is being carried out to eliminate the terrorists present in the area," the ISPR said.

“Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our soldiers further strengthen our resolve,” it added.

The incident comes three days after an army major and a soldier were martyred in an exchange of fire with terrorists in Kech district of Balochistan, hours after the martyrdom of four security personnel in simultaneous attacks on three checkpoints in Sherani district.

A day earlier, three soldiers were martyred and as many civilians were critically injured in a suicide attack in the general area of Miran Shah in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s North Waziristan district.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 6, 2023**

# Kurram clashes

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**CONSIDERING the troubled history of sectarian tensions in KP's Kurram tribal district, and the impact violence in the region can have on communal relations in the rest of the country, the authorities need to act with alacrity as soon as disturbances emerge.**

Unfortunately, the district has again witnessed bloodshed, with several deaths and injuries reported after a tribal clash erupted on Friday – apparently, the result of a quarrel between the residents of two settlements over a disputed parcel of land in upper Kurram.

The violence has continued since. In fact, there are numerous land disputes – some dating to the pre-partition era – among tribes in the district. Worryingly, tribal and communal disputes often take on a sectarian colour in Kurram.

Even more distressing are the claims of some local residents that terrorists of two banned groups, the TTP and Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, have been involved in the latest episode of bloodletting.

The authorities face two major challenges in the current situation: to end the violence and prevent land disputes from descending into bloodshed, and to ensure that sectarian narratives, amplified by social media, do not inflame the situation, especially as Muharram approaches.

Firstly, Kurram itself must be pacified and calm restored, as a humanitarian situation is developing, with people facing shortages of food, fuel and medicine due to the clashes. This is the second major outbreak of tribal/sectarian violence this year; earlier in May, the region experienced a bout of bloodshed as several people, including teachers, were killed in targeted attacks.

That episode was also linked to land disputes. After calm returns, the land commission formed by the KP government should address the land disputes that are at the heart of these clashes judiciously, while the parties involved must abide by their commitments, with violators penalised by the state.

Secondly, the situation requires the security forces to keep a vigilant eye on the movement of banned sectarian militants in this sensitive region. If these elements are not checked, they can further endanger Kurram's fragile communal peace.

With Muharram just a week away, the state as well as the clergy need to put in extra effort to prevent the Kurram clashes from being exploited by vested interests that want to fan sectarian hatred across the country.



In particular, social media accounts that promote violence and hatred, and spread unfounded rumours likely to fuel violence in society, should be monitored. Secondly, clergymen from both sects need to use the pulpit to defuse tensions, instead of fanning the flames.

Kurram and its surrounding areas have been witnessing a tense calm for the last decade or so after several years of bloodshed. The local people should not be abandoned again by the state, left to deal with the escalating sectarian violence on their own.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 12, 2023**

# Give peace a chance

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MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

**LACK of awareness within civil society, weak political manifestation, institutional gaps, misconceptions, and over-expectations from peace talks and amnesty schemes have cast a shadow over a pragmatic approach to dealing with militants and insurgents. Consequently, peace has remained elusive. What lessons have been learned from this process?**

Before peace talks and the announcement of any amnesty scheme, the delicate issue of dealing with militancy needs extensive discussion. Can any state afford a prolonged spell of militancy? For sustainable peace, what are the options: persistent efforts to counter terrorism, killing terrorists, countering ideologies, or increasing investments in diplomacy? There is also a need to understand how media speculation can negatively impact the process. It must be asked: how can we develop political and societal consensus regarding issues related to the peace process, including resettlement? How can we identify and overcome any irritants?

During the pre-negotiations phase, the names and other details of militants must be collected, and a screening committee should be entrusted with scrutiny of the process. The benefits of amnesty schemes should not be used to recycle surrendered militants. Those who surrender should go through a rigorous re-training cycle. Eligible persons should be entitled to a fixed monthly stipend and an initial grant that will only be paid out on the successful completion of training.

Amnesties are used when there is no resolution to an ongoing conflict in sight. To deal with rebels, Uganda tried both kinetic and non-kinetic options. Eventually, in 1999, it opted for peaceful solutions and announced a general amnesty that resulted in the 'Amnesty Act of 2000'. It provided blanket amnesty for all Ugandans engaged in armed rebellion.

To oversee the implementation, a seven-member Amnesty Commission (AC) was established, funded by the Ugandan government and the World Bank's Multi-Country Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme. The Amnesty Act used the term 'reporter' to refer to individuals who had taken steps to secure amnesty. At the time of the establishment of the commission, the approximate number of potential 'reporters' was estimated at 50,000. By the end of 2008, a total of 22,995 people had 'reported' under the scheme.

Under the Ugandan amnesty scheme, a reporter was not to be prosecuted for their past crimes. They were given the option of reporting to the police, army, local council, a magistrate, or a religious leader. A reporter who faced insurgency charges had to declare to a judge, a prison officer, or a magistrate that they had surrendered and desired amnesty. They also had to

surrender their weapons. Reporters residing outside Uganda were provided the option of reporting to a Ugandan diplomatic mission. After the completion of the process, the reporters were given amnesty certificates. The military and police ensured their security. To ensure their well-being, the government also sought assistance from NGOs like Give Me a Chance, which helped the AC repatriate, rehabilitate, and reintegrate former militants. Unicef also helped to resettle child soldiers.

The armed conflict between militants and the military in Nigeria's Niger Delta continued for two decades, defying all peace efforts. To mitigate conflict in the oil-rich region, the Presidential Amnesty Programme was introduced in 2009. PAP was a special intervention from the federal government to disarm, demobilise, and reintegrate former agitators. The PAP followed a multipronged model: robust stakeholder engagement, strategic and targeted communication, community outreach, peace building, and reconciliation.

In our case, amnesty schemes may be classified differently for 'home-based militants' and 'foreign-based militants'. In 2015, the Balochistan government announced a general amnesty for those who abandoned violence. Point 17 of Pakistan's National Action Plan emphasises the need to fully empower the Balochistan government for political reconciliation with complete ownership by all stakeholders. The idea needs to be magnified, so other areas can also be included in such endeavours.

Since militants are far away from the brighter aspects of human life, bringing them closer to the pragmatic aspects of life is inevitable. Militants need to be convinced that death and destruction are not the way to achieve their ideals. However, general amnesty and offering financial incentives may not prove enough in the absence of skills training and employment opportunities, so picking up a gun may be the only option left for militants trying to reintegrate. Denying such an option requires collective will and response. Let's give peace a chance.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 12, 2023**

# 12 soldiers martyred in Zhob, Sui attacks

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**As many as 12 soldiers of the Pakistan Army embraced martyrdom in separate military operations in the Zhob and Sui areas of Balochistan, while seven “heavily armed” militants who reportedly attacked the security forces were also killed, the military’s media wing said in multiple statements.**

This was the military’s highest single-day death toll from terrorist attacks reported this year. Before this, 10 personnel were martyred in a ‘fire raid’ in Balochistan’s Kech district in February 2022.

According to a press release issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on late Wednesday night, security forces came under fire from militants in Sui during an operation in the area. “During the fire exchange, three brave soldiers, having fought gallantly, embraced ‘shahadat’ while two terrorists were sent to hell during the operation,” the statement read.

The Sui attack followed a raid on a military installation in Zhob Cantt in the morning, wherein nine soldiers were martyred and five militants were resultantly killed.

In Zhob, a woman was also killed and at least five civilians received injuries after a Quetta-bound passenger bus was caught in the crossfire. ISPR said that the initial attempt by the assailants “to sneak into the facility was checked by soldiers on duty”.

“In ensuing heavy exchange of fire, the terrorists have been contained into a small area at the boundary,” the ISPR said.

In a follow-up statement issued later on Wednesday night, ISPR said that the security operation at “Zhob Cantt has been completed, and in total five terrorists have been killed during the operation”.

“Security forces and the nation remain resilient and determined to thwart all such dastardly attempts of the enemy aimed at destroying the peace of Balochistan and Pakistan,” the ISPR said.

Citing reports, Zhob Commissioner Saeed Ahmed Umrani said that “five terrorists equipped with heavy automatic weapons” were involved in the attack. “Security forces also suffered casualties in the gun battle which continued till noon,” Mr Umrani told Dawn when contacted.

However, he said that security forces also conducted a search operation in Zhob town and its surrounding areas after receiving information about the presence of suspected terrorists and their facilitators.

Deputy Commissioner Azimullah Kakar confirmed the death of a woman. “The bus which was coming from Dera Ismail Khan was passing through the areas of Zhob cantonment when it was [caught] in the crossfire,” Mr Kakar said, adding that the injured were shifted to Civil Hospital Quetta after initial treatment.

An outfit calling itself the Tehreek Jihad Pakistan (TJP) claimed responsibility for the attack on the Zhob garrison. The same group had earlier claimed responsibility for an attack at an FC camp in the Muslim Bagh area of Qila Abdullah, as well as targeting a police truck on the Quetta-Sukkur highway near Sibi a few months back.

This was the second attack on security forces in Zhob; earlier on July 2, militants attacked three checkpoints of police, levies and the Frontier Corps on the Zhob-Dera Ismail Khan highway in the Sherani district of Balochistan. Three policemen and an FC officer were martyred while an attacker was killed.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif paid tribute to the martyred soldiers. He said that their sacrifice for the homeland would be remembered forever, state-run APP reported.

Balochistan Governor Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar, Chief Minister Mir Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo and Home Minister Ziaullah Langove in separate statements also condemned the attack.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 13, 2023**

# Menaced by terrorism

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THERE is no mistaking the hydra-headed monster of militancy that Pakistan is facing. The last few days have been particularly illustrative of the evolving nature of this multi-dimensional threat. On Wednesday, two separate attacks – both by little-known groups – took place in Balochistan’s Sui and Zhob areas, resulting in the martyrdom of 12 soldiers and a civilian. Seven militants were also killed in the incidents. The Sui attack was claimed by a Baloch insurgent outfit while the other, an assault on a military installation in Zhob Cantt, was claimed by the Tehreek-i-Jihad Pakistan. There was speculation about the latter being a splinter group of the TTP, which denied this; some are now suggesting it is an independent group ‘inspired’ by the Islamic State’s Khorasan chapter. The shape-shifting nature of the militant landscape intensifies the existing challenge. According to a recent report by the Centre for Research and Security Studies, the 267 fatalities of security personnel recorded in the first two quarters of 2023 make up nearly 93pc of their fatalities during the entire preceding year.

Meanwhile, KP police recently shed some light on another category of terrorism: target killing. Its counter-terrorism department has claimed that IS-K is behind the murders of several Islamic scholars as well as members of minority communities in Peshawar, adding that some 60 IS-K members broke out of prison after the Afghan Taliban’s return to power in Kabul and managed to enter Pakistan. At least three Sikhs, an equal number of Muslim clerics and a Christian have been mowed down in the city since February 2023. The victims’ profile illustrates how no one is safe from violent religious extremists: those in their cross hairs can be from minority communities or from the majority faith. All it takes is a twisted mindset that rejects diversity and freedom of religion so vehemently that it does not even consider sacrosanct the right to life itself.

According to the KP CTD, it is closing in on a group of 15 to 20 IS-K militants in order to put it out of action. This cannot be done soon enough. The killing of IS-K leader Sanaullah Ghafari in Afghanistan last month by the Afghan Taliban is likely to be only a temporary setback for an organisation known for its resilience. And with the Kabul regime refusing to take coercive action against other terrorist organisations – their ideological brothers-in-arms – operating from their soil, attacks in Pakistan may escalate further. As per the CRSS report, one security operation was carried out every second day on average in the first six months of this year; at the same time though, more than one attack occurred every day. Pakistan and regional countries must impress upon the Afghan Taliban the absolute necessity of putting militants of all stripe out of business. Otherwise, an endless, Sisyphean task lies ahead.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 14, 2023.**

# Why TTP is opening another front in Balochistan

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MUHAMMAD AKBAR NOTEZAI

**THE recent militant attack in the Zhob town of Balochistan, where the Pakistan military lost nine soldiers, was one of the latest in a string of attacks targeting security forces in areas that were previously considered relatively free of militancy.**

This is a separate phenomenon from the insurgency that plagues the Baloch-majority areas of the province; outfits linked to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its offshoots are now stepping up their attacks against security personnel in the province's northern parts – traditionally considered Pakhtun-majority areas.

Though these areas are closer to the border with Afghanistan and also in close proximity to tribal districts such as South Waziristan, they had remained comparatively less affected by terrorist activities in the past.

Asif Baloch, a Quetta-based newspaper editor, believes that since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, two fronts have been opened against the state, i.e. TTP has stepped up its attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well as the Pakhtun belt of Balochistan.

“The security situation has always been grim in the Baloch parts,” he notes, adding that the Pakhtun belt had not been in the crosshairs of such groups.

In the recent months, the TTP has even been trying to make inroads in the Baloch-majority areas of the province, releasing propaganda videos in Balochi.

In some of these videos, the group talks about missing persons and the deprivation faced by the people of the province, an obvious attempt to make inroads among the Baloch by appealing to their sensibilities.

According to analyst Muhammad Amir Rana, the TTP has traditionally had a support base in the Pakhtun belt, which is why they were able to carry out attacks in these parts.

“Also, their targets are specific. Previously, they would attack the police force, but now they have started targeting FC and military personnel and their camps. Even though the number of attacks has not increased as such, the TTP has been trying to create a disturbance in the region,” he says.

In addition, the TTP has – by its own admission – split the province into two. A statement released by the group some time ago claimed that the Baloch-majority area is part of their Kalat-Makran chapter, while the Pakhtun-dominated parts fall under the Zhob chapter.

As for the new outfit that claimed the audacious attack on the military installation in Zhob – using the moniker of Tehreek-i-Jihad Pakistan – experts believe that it is a “cover name” for the TTP or one of its affiliated outfits.

When asked to explain the change of tactics on part of the TTP, Asif Baloch points out that the western route of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – a flagship project of Beijing – also passes through the Pakhtun-dominated parts of the province.

Since China has been trying to consolidate its position in the region, Mr Baloch sees this as one of the possible reasons behind the rise in attacks there. The security of CPEC has been the responsibility of the Pakistan military, which has tasked the special security division with protecting its assets and infrastructure.

A security official Dawn spoke to also pointed out that hostile agencies had been trying to disrupt the peace in Balochistan, attributing such attacks to their intervention in the province.

“But thanks to our security forces, most of the attacks have been averted,” he noted.

Jalal Noorzai, a Quetta-based columnist and analyst also notes that the militancy plaguing the Pakhtun-majority parts of the province is a relatively new phenomenon.

It shows the banned TTP is trying to consolidate its position in the region, he says, adding: “This does not augur well for peace in the region in general. Unfortunately, if the threat is not contained, it may increase in magnitude in the future.”

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 15, 2023**



## Out of patience

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THE martyrdom of 12 soldiers – the military’s highest single-day death toll from terrorist attacks this year – in two incidents in Balochistan this week is the likely catalyst for the change in tenor. Pakistan’s displeasure with the Afghan Taliban’s accommodating approach to militant outfits (barring IS-K) on their soil has been expressed more sharply than usual, with two messages from the highest echelons of the state coming on consecutive days. On Friday, the military’s media wing released a statement denouncing the “safe havens and liberty of action available to TTP in Afghanistan”. Then, yesterday, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif criticised the Taliban regime for “neglecting its duties as a neighbouring and fraternal country”, and for disregarding the counterterrorism commitments it had made in the Doha peace agreement.

“This situation cannot continue any longer,” he said. Although Mr Asif refrained from saying that Pakistan would engage in hot pursuit of terrorists across the border into Afghanistan, as he asserted some months ago, Pakistan’s patience with Kabul is clearly wearing thin. The ISPR statement about the Afghan Taliban’s inaction vis-à-vis counterterrorism is particularly significant as the security establishment has thus far avoided commenting on the situation so directly. There is good reason for matters having deteriorated to this point. When the Taliban marched into Kabul in August 2021, Pakistan’s leadership was sanguine in the belief that a ‘friendly’ regime had come to power next door. Subsequent events laid bare the fallacy of this assumption. The reality of the situation is reflected in a recent UN report which says that 20 terrorist groups enjoy “freedom of movement under the Taliban’s protection”.

Of these, the regime’s ties with the TTP are “the closest”; in fact, they are considered “part of the emirate”. The doctrine of ‘strategic depth’ appears to have unravelled comprehensively. What can Pakistan do in this situation, aside from voicing its opprobrium to an Afghan dispensation that is impervious to being relegated to the status of an international pariah on account of its human rights violations? While bilateral efforts must continue, a regional approach is more likely to make headway. Such efforts have already begun: in Beijing last month, China, Pakistan and Iran held their first trilateral meeting on the regional security situation. It bears considering that there is a chink in the armour of the Taliban. As the aforementioned UN report dwelt upon at some length, there is a growing schism within its leadership, between the ideologues in Kandahar and the ‘pragmatists’ in Kabul. In January, a Chinese firm signed a multimillion-dollar deal to extract oil from the Amu Darya basin, the first significant foreign investment under the Taliban. The prospect of further such investment in cash-strapped Afghanistan – or the risk of losing it – would surely engage the interest of the pragmatists.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 16, 2023

# Top brass says Kabul abetting terror in Pakistan



A view of the 58th Corps Commanders Conference held at General Headquarters in Rawalpindi.

**Corps commanders of the Pakistan Army blamed Kabul for the uptick in militancy, saying that safe havens and liberty of action, along with the latest weapons available to militants from Afghanistan enabled them to carry out attacks inside Pakistan.**

Islamabad has repeatedly raised concerns over the use of Afghan soil by militants for cross-border terrorism. In a recent statement, the military said it expected the government in Afghanistan to take action against militants and abide by the Doha agreement.

According to Inter-Services Public Relations, Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir presided over the 258th Corps Commanders' Conference held at General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, where the top brass was briefed in detail about the prevailing internal security environment.

“The sanctuaries and liberty of action available to the terrorists of proscribed TTP and other groups of that ilk in a neighbouring country and availability of latest weapons to the terrorists

were noted as major reasons impacting [the] security of Pakistan,” a statement issued by the ISPR said.

Military sources said the inability of the Afghan Taliban to restrain the TTP was the main reason for the latest wave of unrest in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

They said the banned TTP continued to enjoy safe havens and managed to get its hands on sophisticated weapons, as it operates freely in Afghanistan. The sources pointed out that militants involved in the recent attacks in Balochistan were using M-16 rifles and sporting uniforms commonly used by the US military.

The corps commanders also deliberated in detail upon the army’s operational preparedness and training aspects.

Gen Munir said: “Objective training remains the hallmark of our professionalism and we must always remain prepared to guard against any threat to our national security.” The forum also paid rich tribute to the sacrifices being offered by the valiant soldiers to avert the threat of terrorism.

The conference was also apprised about the government’s economic revival plan and the “role of the army in uplifting agriculture, IT, mining and mineral, and defence production sectors under the ambit of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC)”, the ISPR statement said.

The top brass vowed to fully support the strategic initiatives planned by the government for the revival of the economy by providing all possible technical and management support.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 18, 2023**

## 2 policemen martyred, 2 injured in late-night attack on Peshawar checkpoint

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**Two policemen were martyred while as many were injured in a late-night attack on a police check post in the jurisdiction of the Regi police station of Peshawar.**

According to Regi (Warsak circle) Superintendent of Police Arshad Khan, at around 11:45pm last night, police personnel were switching duties at the entrance of the Regi Model Town when unknown assailants opened fire at the policemen. He further told Dawn.com that around 30 metres away from where a police van was parked, around 17 shots were fired from across a river there. An operation was under way after additional checkpoints were set up, SP Khan said.

He added that the police have taken measures while their forces are also alert. SP Khan said it would be premature to specify the number of gunmen and their method of attack. Separately, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inspector General (IG) Akhtar Hayat stated the time of the attack as the early hours of Thursday. He specified that an M4 weapon was used in the sniper firing, adding that a “thermal vision device was probably mounted on the weapon”.

IG Hayat further said that the two policemen suffered headshot wounds, resulting in their martyrdom. Asserting that the morale of the KP police was high, the IG vowed to trace the perpetrators behind the attack. A day ago, a police constable was martyred in Dera Ismail Khan’s Kulachi tehsil when unknown gunmen sprayed him with bullets. On Tuesday, six Frontier Corps men were injured when a suicide bomber rammed an explosive-laden car into a vehicle carrying the paramilitary personnel in Peshawar’s Hayatabad.

### **Uptick in terror activities**

Pakistan has seen an uptick in terror activities, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, after the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year. A report released this month by think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies said the first half of the current year witnessed a steady and alarming rise in terror and suicide attacks, claiming the lives of 389 people across the country.

In a press conference in June, Inter-Services Public Relations Director General Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said that the security forces conducted 13,619 intelligence operations this year in which 1,172 terrorists were killed or arrested. “On a daily basis, over 77 operations are being carried out by armed forces, police, intelligence agencies, and other law enforcement agencies to rid of the menace of terrorism,” he said.

DG Sharif added that 95 soldiers embraced martyrdom in these operations.

Today's incident follows two attacks on the military earlier this month in Balochistan. Both attacks took place on the same day and the martyrdom of 12 soldiers in the two incidents was the military's highest single-day death toll from terrorist attacks reported this year. One of the attacks was launched at Zhob garrison in which nine soldiers were martyred while security forces killed five terrorists in retaliatory action. According to Zhob District Commissioner (DC) Azeem Kakar, a civilian woman was also killed in the incident after being caught in the crossfire while five other civilians were left injured.

Prior to that, security forces came under fire from militants in Sui during an operation in the area. "During the fire exchange, three brave soldiers, having fought gallantly, embraced shahadat (martyrdom) while two terrorists were sent to hell during the operation," the military's media affairs wing said. Two days after the incidents, the army expressed concerns about the "safe havens and liberty of action available to" TTP in Afghanistan.

"It is expected that the interim Afghan government would not allow the use of its soil to perpetrate terror against any country, in the real sense and in line with commitments made in the Doha agreement," an Inter-Service Public Relations statement said. "The involvement of Afghan nationals in acts of terrorism in Pakistan is another important concern that needs to be addressed. Such attacks are intolerable and would elicit an effective response from the security forces of Pakistan," it added. The army top brass reiterated the assertion again yesterday at the 258th Corps Commanders' Conference while Defence Minister Khawaja Asif also accused the Afghan Taliban of not honouring their commitments under the Doha accord, i.e. that they would not allow Afghan soil to be used against others.

Previously too, Islamabad had repeatedly raised concerns over the use of Afghan soil by militants for cross-border terrorism.

In response to the recent concerns raised by the army and government, Afghan Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid disputed the statements from the Pakistani side, saying: "We do not allow them (TTP) to live and operate in Afghanistan. We have faced consequences of wars and do not want others to suffer like Afghanistan."

But in a separate interview with BBC Pashto, Mujahid took a harsher line — ostensibly in a bid to play to the Afghan galleries — advising Pakistan to resolve its internal problems itself, instead of pointing fingers at others.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 20, 2023**

## Five KP policemen martyred in two terror attacks



Security personnel inspect the site of a bomb blast in the Bara area of Khyber district.

Five policemen embraced martyrdom and 12 people – nine personnel and three civilians – suffered injuries when terrorists attacked an official compound in Bara and a police post near Peshawar within a span of a few hours.

Officials said two suicide bombers were intercepted by policemen at the entrance of the tehsil headquarters complex and police station adjacent to Bara bazaar.

They said police engaged the bombers in a gun battle, which left one of the attackers dead, while the other blew himself up. A portion of the building collapsed owing to the impact of the explosion.

Three policemen were martyred and 10 others, including three civilians, injured.

Talking to the media, DPO Salim Abbasi said police were on high alert after receiving intelligence about a possible attack and worked on a well-coordinated plan which saved the area from huge destruction.

The complex is usually visited by a large number of people, but due to strict security arrangements that were put in place on the basis of intelligence about the possible attack many lives were saved, he added.

Police said a car had been impounded from the site which they believed was used by the attackers to reach the place.

Independent sources in Bara told Dawn that offices of the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), an intelligence agency, and the district administration were also located in the building which came under attack.

Officials of the bomb disposal unit said seven to eight kilograms of explosives were used by the suicide bombers, adding that they had recovered pieces of hand grenades.

They recalled that CTD had killed four members of an alleged extortionist gang and arrested 13 others during separate intelligence-based operations in the Akkakhel area a few days ago. The deceased and the detainees were involved in extortion cases in Peshawar, Khyber and some other parts of the province, they added.

The martyred personnel were identified as Mohammad Tayyeb, Bahadar Sher and Anwar while the injured personnel were Hanif Afridi, Zubair Afridi, Jamil Afridi, Bakht Nawaz, Abdul Hadi, Gul Zeb and Nawaz. Hadi is said to be in critical condition.

All the injured were taken to a military hospital.

Funeral prayers for the martyred were offered at the Police Training Centre Shahkas in Jamrud tehsil of Khyber district.

Earlier on Wednesday night, two police personnel were martyred and two others sustained injuries in an attack on a police post in Regi Model Town – a township located on the outskirts of Peshawar.

The attack took place at around 11.45pm and officials believe the militants were equipped with night-vision gadgets – similar devices which were used in a strike that was carried out in the Sarband area near the provincial capital on January 14. A deputy superintendent of police and two gunmen had lost their lives in that incident.

“Our personnel wore bulletproof jackets and bulletproof helmets and militants opened fire at them at a distance of around 50 metres. Headshots and that too precisely forehead shots were only possible with night-vision sights,” Superintendent of Police Arshad Khan told Dawn.

The SP said militants attacked the police team with US made M-4 rifles and the investigation team had recovered around 21 empty shells from the spot, adding that police retaliated but the militants escaped.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 21, 2023**

# CVE policy outline

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MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

**PAKISTAN has been gripped by the menace of violent extremism (VE) since 1979, and has sought to counter it primarily through kinetic means. Thousands of terrorists and extremists have been killed and captured, yet the virus of extremism continues to incubate and there has been a noticeable increase in the number of violent extremists.**

For a long time, 'countering extremism' remained a missing link in our counterterrorism policy framework. The National Internal Security Policy (NISP-I, 2014-18) was the first to incorporate the term 'extremism', citing it 37 times.

It acknowledged that non-traditional threats from extremism had not only impacted the peace index, economic stability and social harmony, as well as instilled a sense of insecurity, they had also negatively impacted the state of fundamental human rights and the country's image.

NISP-I was based on the idea of a 'Comprehensive Response Plan' – a composite process based on dialogue with all sections of society, which also included infrastructure development, rehabilitation of victims of terrorism, creating a national narrative, reconciliation, reintegration, and legal reforms.

The National Counterterrorism Authority (Nacta), in consultation with the other institutions supporting NISP, was supposed to design, develop and implement a National De-Radicalisation Programme. NISP-I identified the use of religious rhetoric to motivate gullible youth to commit suicide missions.

The National Counter-Extremism Policy Guidelines 2018 were formulated through a multidisciplinary and cross-functional process stretching over 34 rounds of deliberations among more than 305 stakeholders.

The NCEPG identified six major areas for policy intervention, including: the rule of law and service delivery; citizen engagement; media engagement; integrated education reform; reformation, rehabilitation, reintegration, renunciation; and promotion of culture.

NCEPG is the first-ever policy guideline that clearly defined 'extremism' as having absolute belief in one's truth with an ingrained sense of self-righteousness. This entrenched sense of righteousness enables the holder of the belief to develop a judgemental attitude towards other people's beliefs, which is followed by intolerance.



NISP-II (2018-23), recognising the success of the hard measures carried out in the wake of the adoption of NISP-I and NAP, prioritises the effective undertaking of soft interventions to consolidate the gains made during the preceding five years. NISP-II notes with concern the rise in incidents of VE on educational campuses. It rightly points out that Pakistani security challenges cannot be resolved through administrative actions and developing counter-narratives alone. The deeper, structural socioeconomic drivers must be addressed as they create a sense of deprivation and act as a breeding ground for VE.

According to NISP-II, inadequate application of the writ of the state and violations of human rights are crucial drivers of extremism. The growth of exclusionary identity discourses around gender, religion, sect, and ethnicity has also contributed to the rise of extremism.

NISP-II rightly points out that minimum national standards must be set for madressahs, as well as the public and private education sectors. At least four per cent of GDP is recommended to be allocated to education. Curriculum reforms and training of teachers on how to prevent the growth of VE on educational campuses has been highlighted.

NISP-II advocates a comprehensive national narrative against extremism predicated on the celebration of diversity and acceptance of the plurality of thought. It urges that steps be taken for the implementation of Pemra regulations pertaining to hate speech, fake news, racial prejudice and the glorification of terrorism and terrorist organisations. Ten per cent of the content is to be earmarked for public service messages, to be used to share messages against extremism.

To effectively combat extremism, it is imperative to reconsolidate the security apparatus, including the role and functioning of Nacta, as well as CVE measures into short-, medium- and long-term plans. To prevent and counter extremism, Nacta must be legally and operationally linked to the provincial counterterrorism departments.

The cyber-policing capabilities of CTDs need generous allocations. Madressahs and campuses should be other top priorities. The surveillance of proscribed persons and organisations should also be made stricter and more realistic. Without building the capacity of preachers, teachers, parents, social workers, women and police to sniff out the virus of extremism, defeating miscreants may remain an elusive dream. The antidote to extremism is education; let us start with bringing 22.8 million out-of-school children to our schools.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 22, 2023**

# Terrorist threat

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OVER the past few weeks, KP has suffered from frequent terrorist attacks. The latest incident occurred in the Jamrud area on Tuesday, when a senior police officer was martyred as he confronted a suicide bomber who had taken refuge in a mosque. Last week, terrorists had attacked a police post in Peshawar's Sarband area, while suicide bombers had also targeted Bara bazaar; numerous police personnel were martyred in the latter incident. It is suspected that members of the Jamaatul Ahrar terrorist outfit may be behind the Jamrud attack, as well as some of the other recent incidents in KP. JuA has an on-again, off-again relationship with the banned TTP; in fact, many of the terrorist groups active in the region have a diffused structure, while splinter factions are also common.

The fresh wave of terrorism confronting KP needs to be addressed to prevent further bloodletting. Far too many security personnel have fallen in the line of duty, while local residents demonstrate for peace, and demand that their areas be cleansed of violent extremists. Hundreds of tribesmen took out a peace rally in Tirah valley on Tuesday calling for an end to targeted killings and extortion in their area; they lamented the fact that militants were moving around "freely" in Khyber district. This is not the first of such gatherings; numerous others have been held in various parts of KP over the past few months, as incidents of terrorist violence have grown after a tenuous ceasefire with the banned TTP fell through.

Whether it is the TTP, JuA or similar outfits, they cannot be given any space to operate, particularly in the former tribal areas. Security operations must be stepped up so that terrorist groups cannot expand their malign activities. Where militant havens in Afghanistan are concerned – both the TTP and JuA are believed to be active in the Afghan provinces bordering Pakistan – Asif Durrani, the government's special representative on Afghanistan, has only recently returned from Kabul after holding talks with the Taliban rulers. From what is publicly known regarding these meetings, Taliban officials have repeated the rhetoric that their soil is not being used for terrorism, though evidence strongly suggests otherwise. While it is the state's responsibility to secure Pakistani territory, the counterterrorism effort will suffer if militants continue to have sanctuaries across the border. Therefore, the government must keep up the pressure on the Afghan Taliban to do more to contain the TTP and other terrorist groups. Kabul's rulers depend on Pakistan to facilitate trade and for diplomatic support. The message from Islamabad should be that if terrorists continue to use Afghan soil, these ties will be affected. Additionally, there should be a continued demand from all of Afghanistan's neighbours to shut down terrorist sanctuaries.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 27, 2023

## 3 terrorists killed in Khyber, South Waziristan operations



A cache of weapons recovered during the two operations.

Three terrorists were killed by security forces in separate operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Khyber and South Waziristan districts, the military's media affairs wing said.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), an exchange of fire occurred between security personnel and terrorists in the Bagh area of Khyber district on July 27. During the operation, one terrorist was killed, and ammunition was recovered from his possession.

In another encounter a day later in Gomal Zam area of South Waziristan district, security forces gunned down two terrorists, the ISPR said.

The ISPR highlighted that the slain terrorists had been actively involved in perpetrating terror activities against security forces and were also responsible for the ruthless killings of innocent civilians.

At present, “the area is undergoing sanitisation operations” to ensure the elimination of any other terrorists in hiding, according to the ISPR’s statement.

Notably, local residents in the area lauded the operation and expressed their unwavering support to completely eradicate the menace of terrorism, the statement added.

Earlier this month, as many as 12 soldiers of the Pakistan Army embraced martyrdom in separate military operations in the Zhob and Sui areas of Balochistan.

This was the military’s highest single-day death toll from terrorist attacks reported this year. Before this, 10 personnel were martyred in a ‘fire raid’ in Balochistan’s Kech district in February 2022.

### **Increase in terror attacks**

Pakistan has seen an uptick in terror activities, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, after the outlawed TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

Earlier this month, four security personnel were martyred while a terrorist was killed after police and Levies checkpoints in the Dhana Sar area of Balochistan’s Sherani subdistrict came under attack.

A report released this month by think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies said the first half of the current year witnessed a steady and alarming rise in terror and suicide attacks, claiming the lives of 389 people across the country.

In June, a police official was martyred and two more were injured in a suicide attack on a police van in Balochistan’s Turbat.

In an earlier incident the same month, two soldiers were martyred after a security forces’ checkpoint in the Kech district along the Pakistan-Iran border came under attack.

In a press conference in June, Inter-Services Public Relations Director General Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said that the security forces conducted 13,619 intelligence operations this year in which 1,172 terrorists were killed or arrested.

“On a daily basis, over 77 operations are being carried out by armed forces, police, intelligence agencies, and other law enforcement agencies to rid of the menace of terrorism,” he said.

**SOURCE: DAWN JULY 29, 2023**

## 'TTP looking to merge with Al Qaeda to expand influence'

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**The banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) might be seeking a merger with Al Qaeda to create an umbrella organisation that shelters all militant groups operating in South Asia, warned a monitoring report submitted to the UN Security Council.**

"Some [UN] member states registered concern that TTP might provide an umbrella under which a range of foreign groups operate, or even coalesce, avoiding attempts at control by the Taliban," the report added. The report, compiled by a UN committee that monitors terrorist activities across the globe, endorsed Pakistan's complaint that the banned TTP has increased its influence in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover. "One member state noted the possibility of [Al Qaeda] and TTP merging. It assessed [Al Qaeda] to be providing guidance to TTP for conducting increased attacks within Pakistan," the report warned.

According to the document, training camps run by various terrorist groups in Afghanistan's Kunar province are being used by fighters of the banned TTP as well. "Since the reunification with several splinter groups, and emboldened by the Taliban take over in Afghanistan, TTP has aspired to re-establish control of territory in Pakistan." UN monitors noted that the proscribed TTP remained focused on high-value targets in border areas and soft targets in urban areas.

"TTP capability is assessed as not matching its ambition, given that it does not control territory and lacks popular appeal in the tribal areas," the report added. The UN committee reported that in June, certain elements of the banned TTP were relocated away from the border area, as part of the Taliban's efforts to rein in the group under pressure from the government of Pakistan. Member states told UN monitors they were concerned that the outlawed TTP could become a regional threat if it continues to have a safe operating base in Afghanistan.

The UN committee, which submitted its report to the Security Council on July 25, shed light on how the banned TTP was gaining momentum in Afghanistan since the Afghan Taliban took control in August 2021. The report also highlighted how other terrorist outfits were using the TTP cover to operate in the war-torn country. "The distinctions between members of Al Qaeda and affiliated groups, including TTP, and [IS-K] are at times blurred at the edges, with individuals sometimes identifying with more than one group and a tendency for people to gravitate towards the dominant or ascending power," the report noted.

"There is growing reporting that other sanctioned terrorist groups are using support to TTP as a means to evade control by the Afghan Taliban," it added.

The document defined Afghanistan as a place of global significance for terrorism, with approximately 20 terrorist groups operating in the country and spreading their influence across regions and to build theocratic quasi-state entities.

The UN committee observed that relationship between the Taliban and Al Qaeda remains close and symbiotic. For the most part, Al Qaeda “operates covertly in Afghanistan to help promote the narrative that the Taliban comply with agreements not to use Afghan soil for terrorist purposes”.

Under the patronage of high-ranking officials of the de facto Taliban authorities, “Al Qaeda members infiltrate law enforcement agencies and public administration bodies, ensuring the security of Al Qaeda cells dispersed throughout the country”.

It estimated that the Al Qaeda core in Afghanistan remains stable at 30 to 60 members, while all Al Qaeda fighters in the country were estimated to be 400, reaching 2,000 with family members. Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent had approximately 200 fighters.



**Zabihullah** @Zabehulah\_M33 · 1 p.m

The Security Council's report that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has relations with Al-Qaeda organization is not true. Al-Qaeda organization has no presence in Afghanistan, and the reports are false. The Islamic Emirate does not allow anyone to use Afghanistan's soil against the security of any other country.



**Zabihullah** @Zabehulah\_M33 · 1 p.m

The Security Council report that the Islamic Emirate has links with al-Qaeda is not true. Al-Qaeda organization does not exist in Afghanistan now, reports about this are incorrect. The Islamic Emirate does not allow anyone to use the territory of Afghanistan against the security of any other country.

Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers, however, have rejected the UN report as incorrect. “The UN Security Council report is not true. Al Qaeda has no presence in Afghanistan,” Zabihullah Mujahid, the primary spokesperson for the Afghan Taliban, tweeted on Friday.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 29TH, 2023

## Fluid & resilient

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**THE militant landscape is nothing if not resilient, adapting to the changes in its environment and the pressures exerted upon it by counterterrorism forces. Law-enforcement agencies must therefore constantly stay one step ahead if they are to even reduce its lethality, let alone eliminate it.**

The 32nd report of the UN's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team offers insight into how militant outfits readjust their strategies; where Pakistan is concerned, political developments in Afghanistan are having an impact whose long-term consequences could be devastating.

For instance, the document notes that in Africa's Sahel region, Al Qaeda and the militant Islamic State group "compete for resources, territory, and hearts and minds" which leads to violent conflict between them.

However, there is "greater fluidity in Afghanistan where relationships and affiliations have a longer history and are more complex. The distinctions between members of Al Qaeda and affiliated groups, including TTP, and [IS-Khorasan] are at times blurred at the edges".

Thus, in this region, militants may identify with more than one group, with a tendency to align themselves with the "dominant or ascending power".

The Afghan Taliban's assumption of power is giving increased operational space to the TTP in Afghanistan, and the spike in cross-border attacks by the banned outfit against Pakistan is compelling evidence of this.

Although pressure by the government here did compel Kabul to relocate certain TTP elements away from the border area, the Taliban's refusal to take coercive measures against the group could add another layer of complexity to the situation.

According to the report, evidence suggests that "other sanctioned terrorist groups are using support to TTP as a means to evade control by the Afghan Taliban".

It adds, this could even lead to a range of foreign outfits coalescing under the TTP's umbrella; already, there are indications that Al Qaeda is providing "guidance" to the TTP for carrying out attacks inside Pakistan, and that TTP fighters have access to training camps of foreign terror groups in Kunar province.

Al Qaeda and IS have also given considerable autonomy to groups affiliated with them; decentralising terror networks enhances their operational effectiveness and ability to tackle CT measures.

Perhaps that is why in Pakistan, one has of late been witnessing attacks by little-known outfits claiming to have links with one or the other of these major terrorist entities.

There is also the Jamaatul Ahrar, with its on-again, off-again relationship with the TTP, whose members are suspected of involvement in several recent acts of terrorism.

The Punjab CTD yesterday claimed to have arrested in several intelligence-based organisations 17 suspected militants belonging to various banned groups. We cannot afford to let up. On no account must violent extremist groups get the opportunity to hold Pakistan hostage again.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 29, 2023**



# Bajaur bombing

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ONCE again, dozens of innocents have paid in blood for their state's failure to apprehend an attack on the country and its people. At the time these lines were being written, at least 35 civilian lives had been lost to the cowardly bombing of a Sunday political convention in KP's Bajaur district, while 85 individuals were battling with injuries of varying degrees, a number of them struggling between life and death.

The grief and anger came in familiar waves — it had been a while since so many civilian lives were lost to a single act of senseless violence, but we are certainly no strangers to the trauma.

We now process it as if by ritual. The standard condemnations have been shared and registered, and the mourners will now commit the deceased to their earthly abodes. Very soon, a senior official will, on record, express their institution's 'unshakeable resolve' with regard to 'eliminating terrorism' from Pakistan. And that will be that. It is important to consider why the workers of a religiously inclined political party could have been subjected to such bestial violence. However ultraconservative the JUI-F's worldview, the party has chosen to contest power and operate within the parameters set by the Constitution of Pakistan.

This does not sit well with a host of militant organisations like the TTP, the IS-K and Al Qaeda, which have competed with democratic parties for control of the Pakhtun belt, particularly the tribal belts of KP and Balochistan. These groups, in the past, targeted and decimated the ANP and Qaumi Watan Party for the same reason.

The JUI-F, however, is an even bigger problem for them as it seeks a path to Islamic rule through the ballot box, while the militants seek the same through 'jihad' and to rule by the sword.

In the past, attacking political gatherings has had a chilling effect on the political activities of targeted parties and eventually pushed some of them out of the picture. With the country gearing up for elections, such terrorist outfits may seek to reassert their presence with fear tactics.

A UNSC report has only recently warned of the possibility of the TTP and Al Qaeda joining forces to expand their influence in South Asia. The occurrence of such incidents makes the Pakistani security apparatus look weak; the National Action Plan seems to have been ineffective in putting a stop to violent incidents. The Taliban regime next door is also proving to be a problem. With the challenges growing, the national security apparatus cannot afford to take its eyes off the ball. However, of late, it seems to be taking too much on its plate. The fact is criticism is sure to follow if its core responsibilities remain unfulfilled.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 31, 2023