COUNTERING MILITANCY IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA (KP)
A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

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POSITION PAPER

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Militancy thrives where governance falters; to win, the state must out-administer, out-govern, and outlast insurgents—not through fear, but by earning trust.

I. Introduction

The resurgence of militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) has reached a critical stage, with terrorist incidents rising to alarming levels. In 2024 alone, over **193 security personnel** have lost their lives in counterterrorism operations, and more than **35 terrorist attacks** occurred in October, claiming 40 lives and leaving countless injured. High-profile attacks, such as the **Lower Kurram violence** that killed 40 civilians and 100 in the aftermath- the targeted killing of 12 security personnel in Bannu, demonstrate the gravity of the situation. In addition the financial networks of militant groups, such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)[1], are estimated to generate significant revenue annually through extortion, illegal taxation, and smuggling activities, which are key to sustaining their operations[2].

The World Bank's Local Government Performance Index (2018) suggests that decentralized governance can significantly reduce conflict by promoting local accountability and addressing grievances.

It's time their realization that this multifaceted crisis requires a shift from reactive, military-heavy approaches to a comprehensive, multidimensional framework that integrates governance, community empowerment, socioeconomic development, and effective security measures.

II. Background

Militancy in KP has persisted due to several overlapping factors:

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[1] Perri, T. (2021). Militant financing: A regional perspective on South Asia. Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Strategic Studies.

[2] Fair, C. C. (2014). Militant conflicts and terrorist financing in Pakistan. South Asia Journal of Political Studies, 4(1), 45–60.

a)   The TTP exploits ungoverned spaces in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, using them to regroup and launch attacks.
b)   Weak institutions, limited accountability, and corruption have eroded public trust in state mechanisms.
c)   High poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to quality education and healthcare create fertile ground for militant recruitment.
d)   A lack of coordination among security agencies undermines counterterrorism effectiveness.
e)   Heavy-handed policies and a lack of community engagement have alienated local populations, making them vulnerable to extremist narratives.

The most effective method of deterring insurgency is economic opportunity, as argued by Paul Collier in his 2007 book Development as a Weapon of Peace. The militants promise swift 'justice' in areas where the state's absence is glaring. The state cannot reverse this narrative without visible and meaningful development.

III. Actions Taken

Pakistan has implemented several measures to address militancy in KP, including:

a)   Deployment of military and paramilitary forces in volatile areas.
b)   Enhanced border control measures, including fencing, to curb infiltration.
c)   Targeted operations in tribal districts to dismantle militant strongholds.
d)   Enforcement of the **Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) 1997**, enabling prosecution and detention of suspected militants.
e)   Establishment of military courts for expedited trials of high-profile cases, though criticized for lack of transparency.
f)   Organization of **jirgas** and tribal councils to mediate local disputes and build consensus on peace initiatives.
g)   Launch of de-radicalization programs for rehabilitating former militants, though on a limited scale.
h)   Dialogues with Afghanistan to address cross-border militancy.
i)   Regional cooperation with China, Russia, and other partners to strengthen security coordination.

The state must now reclaim spaces it had ceded—both literally and symbolically—by out-governing the very militants it seeks to defeat. While these actions have yielded tactical successes, they have failed to address the root causes of militancy or promote sustainable peace.

IV. Gaps and Challenges

Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain:

a) Excessive use of kinetic measures without addressing socio-economic or ideological drivers of militancy.
b) The continued use of extrajudicial tactics, such as "kill-and-dump" operations, fuels militant propaganda and undermines public trust.
c) Limited investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure in underserved districts perpetuates inequality and discontent.
d) High unemployment rates among youth make them vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups.
e) Inconsistent enforcement of counterterrorism laws, such as **Section 21-E** of the ATA, hinders effective prosecution.
f) Military courts lack transparency, reducing public confidence in the justice system.
g) Militant safe havens in Afghanistan allow groups like the TTP to maintain operational capacity despite domestic counterterrorism measures.
h) Fragmented roles among police, paramilitary forces, military, and intelligence agencies result in operational inefficiencies.
i) Heavy-handed security measures and perceived state neglect alienate local communities, eroding their trust in government institutions.

Jessica Stern, in Terrorism Financing: The Failure of Counter Measures (2010), emphasizes that dismantling financial lifelines cripples' militant operations. The lure of militancy is fueled by desperation; breaking this cycle necessitates addressing not only the perpetrators but also the socio-economic conditions that cause it.

V. Way Forward

A comprehensive framework must address these gaps through integrated governance, development, and security strategies :

a) **External Measures**
  i. Enhance diplomatic pressure on the Taliban to dismantle safe havens for militants across the border.
  ii. Collaborate with regional partners, including China and Russia, to strengthen collective security and mitigate cross-border threats.
  iii. Develop agreements with neighboring states to share intelligence and jointly combat terrorism financing and arms trafficking.

b) **Internal Measures**
  i. Establish a Provincial Finance Commission to empower district governments and address grievances through localized solutions.
  ii. Strengthen inter-agency coordination through joint task forces and improved intelligence-sharing platforms.
  iii. Increase transparency in government spending to reduce corruption and dismantle parallel economies that fund militancy.

iv. Conduct regular reviews of counterterrorism policies to assess their effectiveness and recalibrate strategies as needed.

v. Develop a unified crisis response system that integrates the military, police, and civil society to handle emergencies cohesively.

c) Kinetic Measures

i. Equip local police and Counter-Terrorism Departments (CTDs) with the necessary resources, training, and autonomy to respond to threats effectively.

ii. Replace extrajudicial tactics with lawful detention, transparent prosecution, and rehabilitation programs, reinforcing state legitimacy.

iii. Conduct transparent trials of high-profile militants to delegitimize their narratives and disrupt recruitment.

iv. Reorganize policing structures, assigning police to handle settled areas while reserving military efforts for non-settled zones and extreme threats.

d) Non-Kinetic Measures

i. Implement community policing models to rebuild trust between law enforcement and local communities.

ii. Prioritize education, vocational training, and healthcare initiatives in vulnerable districts to reduce the socio-economic conditions that breed radicalization.

iii. Launch community-based programs to engage tribal elders, civil society, and youth in planning and implementing development projects, creating ownership and reducing extremism.

iv. Promote civic education campaigns to counter extremist ideologies, instilling values of tolerance and coexistence.

v. Expand microfinance initiatives to create alternative livelihood opportunities, targeting populations vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups.

vi. Strengthen anti-money laundering measures and disrupt extortion and illegal financial networks that sustain militant activities.

vii. Support and empower women through targeted community programs, ensuring they play a role in counter-radicalization efforts and the promotion of peacebuilding.

VI. Conclusion

The escalating militancy in KP is a serious threat to Pakistan's stability. A balanced and integrated strategy that combines governance reforms, community empowerment, and tactical precision is necessary to tackle this challenge. To win this war, the state must not just deploy force but build bridges of trust over the deep trenches of fear and resentment militants have dug.

In Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice (2006), David Galula apty states that transparency and community trust are essential for the success of counterinsurgency efforts. The clock is ticking; failure to govern with urgency and empathy today will only ignite an inferno of upheaval tomorrow. It is time for Pakistan to act decisively. KP must emerge not as a cautionary tale, but as a blueprint for resilience and reform.

References

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5.	World Bank. The Local Government Performance Index. 2018.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Syed Kaleem Imam is a former civil servant, known for his extensive contributions in law enforcement, academics, and organizational development. He has a PhD in Politics and International Relations and an LLM in Human Rights Law from SOAS, UK, master's in philosophy.

He held the position of Inspector General of Police (IGP) in several regions such as Punjab, Islamabad, and Sindh, further serving twice on the National Highways and Motorways. As the Federal Secretary of the Narcotics Control Ministry, he played a key role in formulating national policies that harmonized with international strategies.

He has been the Chief of Operations in Mozambique, Planning Coordinator in Liberia, and UN Police Commissioner in Darfur, Sudan. His service was honored with three UN peace medals, the Quaid Azam Police Medal, the President's Police Medal, and the Sitara Imtiaz and Tamagha-i-Imtiaz.

Moreover, Imam has been instrumental in shaping academic discourse through his numerous national and international publications to his credit and frequently participating in public forums, training institutes, and media outlets. Besides being a security analyst, he is also a law and governance consultant, a strategist, and a policy practitioner.