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Director's Note



The first quarter of 2026 was devoted to finalising the framework for the National Strategy against Organised Crime in Pakistan. Steered by the UNODC, the process stands completed. This work was completed by a team of experts, professionals and researchers of CGR and CFHR.

The CGR also released the annual report for 2025 on Pakistan's UNTOC Review Mechanism, containing the civil society's perspective.

We look forward to participating in all the Constructive Dialogues on UNTOC, CCPCJ in June, Crime Congress in September and Conference of Parties in October 2026.

Tariq Khosa

Director CGR

Human smuggling solution

The recent announcement that Pakistan, Italy, Spain and Greece have reached a consensus to establish legal migration pathways while jointly combating human smuggling marks a new beginning after several years of failed attempts to curb illegal migration operations. These operations take advantage of the desperation of economically-deprived Pakistanis or oppressed minorities who are seeking a better life in affluent countries, especially in Europe.

While there is still much work to be done before formal agreements can be signed, there have already been some breakthroughs on smaller levels, including recent deals with Italy for 10,500 work visas for Pakistani workers in sectors including shipbreaking, hospitality, healthcare and agriculture. Many of these sectors are already popular among illegal migrants from Pakistan, so the visa deal is essentially a way to formalise workforce participation and bring them out of the dark.

Work visa agreements benefit all parties, since they help host countries address under-the-table employment and the use of grey channels. At the same time, Pakistan's oversupply of less educated youngsters would find many opportunities in physical, labour-intensive professions, which are generally unpopular among local citizens in most wealthy countries. And because work visas would give workers legal status, they would also be more likely to use formal banking channels, especially for remitting money.

Pakistan's recent efforts to reduce illegal migration have already been bearing fruit – the European states reportedly said there has been a 47% reduction in illegal migration cases, and the availability of a legal option will obviously deliver another blow to traffickers. The new understanding between Pakistan and the three European countries is proof that migration issues can have win-win solutions reachable through diplomatic means, as long as the parties approach talks earnestly. Aside from legal migration pathways, additional support to crack down on human traffickers will also help clear up the situation on the ground here and encourage more people to choose safe and legal channels.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, MARCH 2, 2026

‘Combat-related deaths jump 30pc amid wave of suicide attacks’: says PICSS



Army soldiers secure the entrance site after suicide bombers targeted the headquarters of a paramilitary force in Peshawar.

- PICSS says first two months of 2026 see almost half of all 2025 suicide attacks
- Balochistan records ‘visible decline’ in attacks

ISLAMABAD: Combat-related fatalities in Pakistan surged by 30 per cent in February 2026, driven by a sharp increase in suicide attacks across the country, according to monthly statistics released by an Islamabad-based think tank.

The report by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) documented 470 deaths and 333 injuries during the month. The dead included 96 civilians, 80 security forces personnel and 294 militants. The number of injured comprised 259 civilians, 50 security forces personnel and 24 militants.

The figures represent a 74pc surge in the deaths of security forces personnel, a 32pc rise in civilian deaths and a 21pc increase in militant deaths compared to the previous month.

Violence escalated significantly in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and its merged districts (erstwhile Fata). The region saw 53 security forces personnel and six civilians killed, with an additional 35 security personnel and 48 civilians injured. The province endured three suicide

bombings in February, which killed 17 people, including 14 security forces personnel, and injured 20 civilians.

According to the report, the surge in attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa led to Pakistan's cross-border air strikes and subsequent military clashes with Afghanistan.

The capital also faced a major attack, with one suicide bombing in the suburbs of the Islamabad Capital Territory killing at least 34 people and injuring 165. Another suicide bombing in the Bhakkar district of Punjab province killed two police personnel and injured four others.

The eight suicide attacks recorded in the first two months of the year are nearly half the total for all of 2025, when 17 such incidents occurred, a statistic the report called "a dangerous trend of rising suicide bombings." Security forces also arrested a would-be suicide bomber during the month.

In Balochistan, however, the PICSS data showed a visible decline in militant attacks following the launch of a retaliatory operation, "Raddul Fitna-1," by security forces early in the month. Security operations in the province killed 176 militants.

Overall, PICSS data for the first two months of 2026 shows 831 combat-related deaths, including 536 militants, 169 civilians and 126 security forces personnel.

SOURCE: DAWN, MARCH 2, 2026

Punjab CM approves province's first cybercrime investigation unit



Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz attends a meeting.

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz approved the establishment of the province's first cybercrime investigation unit and made e-tagging mandatory for all vehicles, including motorcycles.

According to an official press release, during a special meeting to crack down on digital terrorism and bring cyber networks under strict surveillance, the Punjab CM said the state's surveillance across Punjab would be significantly intensified in the coming days.

She also directed the establishment of a "micro security iron shield" within seven days. Further, CM Maryam also gave the go-ahead for the establishment of a "Punjab Cybercrime Investigation Unit (CCIU)" and also approved the appointment of its head, the handout said.

Further, she also approved a special protection cell for women affected by cybercrime. She also approved district-level cybercrime centres across Punjab, saying that no "safe routes" would be allowed for criminal groups in the province, it added.

During the meeting, the Punjab CM said that e-tagging would be mandatory for all vehicles in the province, including motorcycles.

Further, she directed to block movement through non-traditional provincial entry points, and the installation of searchlights at entry points and drone surveillance.

She also directed rooftop monitoring systems at check posts and ordered the department concerned to procure an advanced drone defence system, the press release said.

She also stressed on the regulation and restriction of unauthorised drone usage. CM Maryam stated that combing operations would continue to identify terrorists and criminal elements.

She also gave instructions to enhance training and equip the Riot Management Police with modern gear.

“We must remain united and proactive to eliminate terrorism. We cannot afford complacency as everyone must remain vigilant,” she was quoted as saying.

“The nature of warfare has changed, and we must adapt and prepare accordingly,” she added.

SOURCE: DAWN, MARCH 2, 2026

Ms Monica Kathina Juma of Kenya

Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
and Director-General, United Nations Office at Vienna



United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres announced the appointment of Monica Kathina Juma of Kenya as Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as well as Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV). She succeeds Ghada Fathi Waly of Egypt, to whom the Secretary-General is grateful for her dedicated service to the Organization.

The Secretary-General also wishes to extend his appreciation to John Brandolino, Director of the Division for Treaty Affairs at UNODC, who will continue to serve as Acting Executive Director of UNODC and Acting Director-General of UNOV until Ms. Juma assumes her position.

Currently serving as the National Security Adviser to the President of the Republic of Kenya and Secretary to Kenya's National Security Council (since 2022), Ms. Juma is a strategic senior leader with a depth of expertise, experience and knowledge spanning public policy making, execution, and academia across critical areas of security, diplomacy and governance. She held the role of Cabinet Secretary in strategic Ministries of Kenya, namely the Ministry of Energy (2021-2022); Ministry of Defence (2020-2021); Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018-2020) and was

Acting Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining (2022). She further served as Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2016-2018), Department of Interior, Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government (2014-2016), and Ministry of Defence (2013-2014).

She was Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Kenya to Ethiopia and Djibouti and Permanent Representative of Kenya to the African Union, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and United Nations Commission for Africa (UNECA) (2010-2013). Her academic experience includes Executive Director, Research Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) (2008-2010); Executive Director, Africa Policy Institute (2006-2008); Adjunct Faculty Member, African Centre for Strategic Studies, National Defence University - Washington DC (since 2002); and Senior Researcher/Policy Analyst, Safer Africa (2002-2006).

Ms. Juma holds a PhD, Doctor of Philosophy, University of Oxford, United Kingdom (1998-2000) as well as a Master of Arts and a Bachelor of Arts in Government and Public Administration, University of Nairobi, Kenya (1991; 1987). In addition to English, she speaks Kiswahili and Kamba languages.

SOURCE: UN.ORG, MARCH 6, 2026

Pakistan comes under scrutiny as UK cracks down on 'asylum abuse'

- 'Cooperation' with UK authorities has kept Islamabad off visa ban list so far
- Rejection rate of asylum claims by Pakistanis at 70pc, but very few deportations
- Shadow home secy pushes for tougher measures

LONDON: As the UK bans visas to a handful of countries that have high asylum cases, Pakistan has come under renewed scrutiny after questions were raised about the low number of deportations.

The development comes days- after the UK put an 'emergency brake' on visas for the first time on nationals from four countries following a surge in asylum claims from legal routes. In a move described as "unprecedented" by the government, the Home Office will end sponso-red study visas for all nationals of Afghanistan, Cam-eroon, Myanmar and Sudan and also end skilled wor-ker visas for Afghan nationals.

Earlier this week, a journalist asked UK Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood why Pakistan had not yet been targeted by proposed visa restrictions, noting that the country accounted for the largest share of people who entered Britain on legal visas and later applied for asylum.

The question also highlig-hted the low return rate of reje-cted Pakistani asylum seekers.

"This is not the end of the action we will take," Mahmood said in response. "This is the beginning and not the end of the action we will take in this area."

However, she declined to comment on whether discussions were underway with other countries regarding possible visa sanctions.

Pakistan 'cooperating'

Sources on both the Pakistan and British government sides told Dawn that although Islamabad was cooperating with the UK authorities on the repatriation of rejected asylum seekers, the number of Pakistanis on student visas who later sought asylum was very high, prompting alarm from the UK government.

They added that discussions were ongoing between the two sides and that Pakistan's cooperation might be the reason it had not been targeted by a ban.

Official figures show that Pakistani nationals now represent the largest group seeking asylum in the United Kingdom, accounting for roughly one in 10 applications.

In 2024, 10,638 Pakistanis applied for asylum, nearly double the total recorded a year earlier and higher than applicants from Eritrea, Iran and Afghanistan.

Many applicants initially enter Britain through legal routes, including student, work or visitor visas, before later submitting asylum claims.

70pc rejected

Government data indicates that more than 70 per cent of Pak-istani asylum claims are rejected.

Despite the high refusal rate, only a small number of unsuccessful applicants are returned. Home Office figures show that 10,853 Pakistani asylum claims were refused in 2025, but just 445 individuals were deported to Pakistan during the same period – around 4.1pc of rejected applicants, or roughly one in 25.

British officials say countries that fail to cooperate in accepting deported nationals could face a range of penalties, including the suspension of priority visa services or broader restrictions affecting tourists, students and workers.

A government source told British media that the UK would not hesitate to impose visa sanctions on countries that do not cooperate in taking back their citizens. The figures have also triggered a political debate in Britain.

Chris Philp, the shadow home secretary, described the removal rate as “pathetic”, noting that a returns agreement was signed with Islamabad in 2022 when then home secretary Priti Patel was in office.

He argued that tougher steps were needed.

“We must drastically reduce the number of visas granted to Pakistani nationals and exit the European Convention on Human Rights so that people with no right to be here can be deported,” he said.

SOURCE: DAWN, MARCH 7, 2026

Asylum applications

BRITAIN'S tough immigration posture has again drawn attention to the sharp rise in asylum claims by Pakistani nationals. While the UK recently imposed an "emergency brake" on certain visa routes for some countries, Pakistan has so far escaped similar curbs. Yet the debate in London suggests that the issue is far from settled. According to official data, Pakistanis now constitute the largest group applying for asylum in the UK. Over 10,000 sought asylum in 2024 – almost double the figure recorded a year earlier. Many entered the UK through legal routes – student, visitor or work visas – and later sought asylum. However, the picture is more complex than what political rhetoric suggests. Both British and Pakistani sources say that Islamabad has been cooperating with the UK on the repatriation of rejected asylum seekers. When individuals are formally identified and travel documentation is arranged, Pakistan has generally facilitated the process of return, which may partly explain why it has not yet faced sweeping visa curbs.

Nonetheless, the scale of asylum applications is troubling. More than 70pc of Pakistani claims are reportedly rejected, suggesting they do not meet the legal threshold for protection. When individuals exploit legal visa routes to pursue weak asylum claims, they weaken trust in the entire visa framework, which is particularly damaging for the thousands of genuine Pakistani students coming to the UK each year. If British officials conclude that legal visa routes are being misused, the most immediate victims will be legitimate applicants. For Pakistan, the challenge is twofold. Continued cooperation on deportations is essential to maintain diplomatic credibility. But an equally urgent task lies at home: understanding why so many citizens view asylum as an attractive pathway. Economic pressures, misinformation by migration agents and unrealistic expectations about jobs abroad all play a role. Left unaddressed, these trends will jeopardise educational and professional pathways for genuine applicants.

SOURCE: DAWN, MARCH 9, 2026

Future of VNSAs

MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

POST-9/11, violent non-state actors impact the world order and intensify debate on their future, which will be shaped by governance quality and geopolitical, technological, environmental and societal trends. VNSAs try to erode state monopoly on violence, control territory, extort money, dispense 'justice', provide relief and perform security functions, using violence to achieve their political, ideological or economic aims. They challenge national and global security as well as governance and development, and weaken state authority and institutions, creating power vacuums.

Via the internet, VNSAs strengthen their propaganda, deface and hack official websites and attempt online radicalisation. Their use of encrypted communication platforms like Telegram, makes surveillance and tracking them difficult. They also use drones for sabotage, breaking state monopoly and accessing cheap aerial reconnaissance that aid attacks on targets. Thus states must invest in digital governance and cyber policing.

Due to the internet, their physical presence isn't necessary for global coordination: propaganda can be spread at minimal cost, and worldwide recruitment and radicalisation carried out. Many terrorist groups prefer child soldiers – a grave human rights violation, which also poses a serious long-term threat to states. Globalisation enables them to buy drones and radio jammers, turning small groups into regional militants. The response demands joint CT cooperation. Technology has helped embed them in crowded cities, making urban warfare harder for states. It has also removed geographical barriers, allowing them to recruit, fund-raise, radicalise, coordinate and influence public views through better planning and logistics. Open-source intel such as Google Maps and satellite imagery helps them plan attacks, understand the terrain and track movement. Militaries function as centralised forces; VNSAs adapt to a decentralised structure, posing difficulties for LEAs which operate within legal frameworks, with ethical norms and geographical limits. Committed to their narrative, militants violate these. Fragmentation of terrorist groups has led to localisation, as seen in the case of IS and Al Qaeda, each with specific local aims.

They may at times have a leaderless resistance, and operate in small autonomous cells or as lone wolves. Lack of clear leadership makes detection and arrests difficult. Weak institutions in some parts of the Middle East, Africa and Afghanistan give VNSAs space. In poorly governed states, they try to replace the state and expand their influence by creating their own administration, including a justice system, leading to long-term CT efforts.

VNSAs thrive in conflict-ridden, poorly governed spaces with social fragmentation in tribal communities. They take advantage of global power rivalries and poor governance, weakening state capacity and legitimacy. Great power rivalry can fuel demand for VNSAs, leading to acquisition of arms and funds to increase their durability. Their presence exposes gaps in

internal and external policies, flaws in administrative and criminal justice systems, and misinterpreted religious beliefs. They benefit from policy and legal ambiguity as they're labelled organised criminals, terrorists and insurgents. They often employ hybrid tactics combining criminal intent and violence with ideological aims, making it difficult to distinguish between terrorism, insurgency and organised crime. Some groups in Afghanistan, Balochistan and the former tribal belts have made this part of their strategy.

Natural disasters caused by climate change can create breeding grounds for VNSAs who exploit the resulting power vacuum to build narratives, recruit and radicalise the younger generations through disinformation. Prolonged civil wars benefit them, hence they resist peace settlements.

Technology links VNSAs with diaspora networks and enables fund appeals. Cryptocurrency and online fundraising links them with sympathisers, easing money transfer across borders. Anonymous donations and transfers undermine conventional CT financing efforts. To cover operational costs, VNSAs generate money by exploiting natural resources, leading to environmental degradation, drug trafficking and extortion.

Terrorism has resurged in areas bordering Afghanistan. Despite earlier kinetic gains, militant factions have resurfaced with new strategies, alliances and operational capacity. States must combine hard power, governance reform, technological solutions and community engagement. VNSAs won't go away but their forms, tactics and motivations will change. Tech innovations, social change, rights movements, effective local governance and better community ties will strengthen the modern state and reduce the space for VNSAs.

SOURCE: DAWN, MARCH 17, 2026

Democracy and freedom deficit

SHAHID NAJAM

The politicians, the power brokers and the people of Pakistan, though peripherally, have been engaged since independence in a procrastinated and vain struggle to define, fashion and custom-operate the attributes and features of a system of democratic governance and freedom in the country. The oft-repeated rationale or apologia in terms of the historical legacy of colonial sufferings and servitude, which we inherited, a widely pervasive socio-structural exclusionary mindset and the elite's self-arrogated belief of institutional superiority and custodianship of "national interest" no longer offer a sufficiently convincing logic for democratic deficit and recurrent praetorian episodes in the country.

Paradoxically, however, despotic constitutional amendments to bestow a veneer of legality, asymmetrical power distribution, deliberate erosion of state institutions and manipulative fragmentation of the already fragile pluralist entities continue to reinforce and strengthen the clutches of the ruling clique. The right of the people to freely exercise their rights remains an elusive dream. They constantly oscillate between hope and despair amidst interminable entrapment in poverty, disenfranchisement and deprivation. The unending sagas of failure of democratic systems, perennial economic instability, perpetual rule of mutually symbiotic politico-military nexus and rampant corruption characterise the meandering journey and erratic endowment of today's Pakistan. It is indeed lamentable that the country ranks 124 out of 160 countries surveyed on the Democracy Index 2024 and is classified as an "authoritarian regime".

The Global Peace Index 2025 places Pakistan at number 144 out of 163 countries due to the frequency of political upheavals and governance dysfunction. The country has slid back 2 spots from 133 in 2023 to 135 in 2024 out of 180 countries, according to the latest Transparency International Corruption Index. The Washington-based Freedom House, which tracks people's access to political rights and civil liberties in 208 countries and territories, in its 2025 report, placed Pakistan among the countries with the steepest 10-year decline in freedom.

To add to the gravity of the situation, the World Justice Report of 2025 relegated Pakistan to 130th rank out of 143 countries on the Rule of Law Index due to repressive and authoritarian practices. The deplorable dereliction of the state to ensure ethnic, minority and fundamental rights to the people was the primary determinant for this indictment. On the international front also, though the seated rulers of a country of more than 255 million people assiduously swagger and swank of Pakistan being a "sovereign state", the acrimonious reality is that, based on 2025-26 data, the country is rated as highly susceptible to external political and economic pressures

The predicament is that the institutionalised alliance of egocentric and incompetent self-seekers continues to consolidate, multiply and deepen the tentacles of its power structure through a multitude of coercive means and weaponisation of ill-got advantage of money and might sans accountability. In the process, they have severely subverted the autonomy of the institutions,

including parliament, judiciary, executive and the media. Totally oblivious and insensitive to the plight of the people, they mercilessly personalise the policy process and squander huge resources on their perks and privileges. According to a UNDP report, Pakistan has to allocate a huge chunk of \$17.4 billion annually to secure its luxurious and ostentatious lifestyle. The purchase of a Gulfstream jet in Punjab at a cost of Rs11 billion recently is a palpable manifestation of their venality and criminality, where approximately 10 million children are out of school, and around 70 per cent of the rural population relies on expensive private healthcare due to systemic infrastructure shortfalls and a shortage of essential medicines.

What honour and prestige is left to us as a nation in this highly globalised and interconnected world to find a dignified space among the community of nations! It is indeed absolutely imperative to carry out a serious introspection and conduct an all-inclusive dialogue involving the major stakeholders, e.g. citizens, politicians, bureaucrats, judiciary, media, and the establishment, to hammer out an agreed framework of action to come out of this abyss. A shared vision and collective identity need to be articulated to galvanise a strong national will; glue the ethnic diversity, cultural heterogeneity and parochial insularities into oneness; and move forward imbued with "Pride in Pakistan" societal ethos.

People's empowerment is the ultimate panacea to sustain national unity and create much-needed state-citizen synergy to resuscitate a loyal and patriotic national disposition. The fundamental prerequisite, however, is to establish a conducive and credible environment for the people to: a) express their political, economic, social and cultural preferences; and b) exercise their right to choose their leaders as well as constitutional and governance frameworks. This, a priori, warrants holding free and fair elections, respecting people's mandate and safeguarding the sanctity of democracy.

The major issues and challenges to be addressed upfront are: how to rid the country of praetorian-pluralist swing and sway; what needs to be done to facilitate a systemic societal transformation from a confrontational mindset to constructive engagement; how to shun the anachronistic command-obedience governance model and institute good governance; and above all, how to unlearn the historically-parroted and ill-founded narratives of existential threat, traitor-renegade indictment and oft-inflicted doctrines of necessities, exceptionalities and manipulative security interventionism. Authoritarian democracy, based on coercive denial of civil liberties, can never generate national strength or a strong national will to emerge as a dignified sovereign state. Apart from the burgeoning domestic challenges, we have to deal with the geo-strategic, geo-economic and geo-political dictates in the increasingly uncertain, ambiguous, complex and intensely polarised global and regional arenas to safeguard our interests.

Democracy, freedom, inclusivity and integration are the only way forward for us to survive and prosper. We have to wake up and acknowledge that the elite-rule of avaricious incompetents imposed through machination, might, and ploys is no more than a toxic, illusory and delusive narcissism. It is being mocked and ridiculed ad infinitum and ad nauseam all around both domestically and internationally. The sooner we realise this critical truth, the better for us.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, MARCH 18, 2026

Massive crackdown on money launderers across the country

LAHORE: The Ministry of Interior, in collaboration with finance ministry, announced launching a massive crackdown on money-laundering and hawala/hundi networks across the country.

A joint working group comprising the officials of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) will be formed to regularly review the progress made in this regard.

A meeting held under the joint chairmanship of Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Federal Minister for Finance Muhammad Aurangzeb on Tuesday chalked out a framework to lay hand on those involved in illegal money transactions.

FIA Director General Dr Usman Anwar, SBP governor and federal finance secretary were also present in the meeting.

“The huddle resolved that strict action will be taken against the business figures and institutions involved in transferring funds abroad through illegal channels,” a spokesperson for interior ministry said in a statement after the meeting.

It said the meeting further decided that no leniency would be shown to individuals or entities engaged in money laundering and hawala/hundi operations.

The statement said the funds could only be transferred abroad through the banking system and other legal channels.

“The process of sending money overseas through exchange companies will also be streamlined, and the entire remittance mechanism will be made transparent and foolproof,” it said.

The meeting emphasised discouraging all illegal channels of sending money abroad at every level.

The interior and finance ministers said that a strong action would be taken against major money launderers and that hawala/hundi operations would not be tolerated under any circumstances.

“A joint working group comprising the State Bank of Pakistan and the FIA officers will be formed to have a constant follow up and coordination in matters related to money laundering and hundi/hawala,” the spokesperson said. The governor State Bank briefed the meeting on the system of fund transfers through banking channels.

SOURCE: DAWN, MARCH 18, 2026

Different threats, same playbook

BY SHAUKAT JAVED



Police officers collect evidence amid the debris after a bomb blast at a railway station in Quetta, November 9, 2024.

Pakistan is once again confronting a sharp rise in militant violence, marking one of the most challenging internal security phases since the peak of terrorist incidents in 2010.

In the years following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, attacks have increased in frequency, coordination and lethality. Yet the more troubling reality is not just the resurgence of militancy but the state's continued reliance on a largely kinetic response to what are, in fact, two very different threats.

Pakistan today is dealing with two distinct theatres of violence – each driven by separate motivations, actors and end goals. Treating them through a uniform security lens risks strategic stagnation.

The first theatre is centred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Pashtun belt of Balochistan, where militancy is ideologically driven in the name of religion. Groups such as the TTP and the Haqqani Network, supported by the Afghan Taliban and transnational actors like ISKP and remnants of Al-Qaeda link networks, seek to grab a chunk of land to establish a rigid, exclusionary version of a Sunni theocratic state.

The return of the Afghan Taliban to power has altered the operational environment in their favour. Whether through direct support, tolerance or inability to act, the space available to anti-Pakistan militant groups across the border has expanded. The TTP has demonstrated

renewed organisational coherence and operational capability, carrying out increasingly sophisticated attacks with arms left by the US.

The second theatre lies in Balochistan's Baloch-majority districts, where the conflict is not religious but political. Baloch insurgent groups frame their struggle around grievances of political marginalisation, inequitable resource distribution, lack of provincial autonomy and human rights concerns. Their objectives range from greater autonomy within the federation to outright separatism.

These are fundamentally different conflicts. One is ideological and transnational; the other is political and sub-nationalist. Yet Pakistan's response to both remains overwhelmingly similar: intelligence-based military operations, supplemented increasingly lately using airpower, including reported cross-border strikes against militant sanctuaries.

There is little doubt that such operations have delivered tactical gains. However, tactical success has not translated into lasting stability. Militant violence subsides temporarily, only to re-emerge in more adaptive forms. The problem is not the use of force per se; it is over-reliance on it.

A critical but often overlooked dimension of this challenge is the weakening of Pakistan's institutional coordination framework. The mandate for integrating and harmonising national counterterrorism efforts formally rests with the National Counter Terrorism Authority (Nacta). Effective coordination requires neutrality and the ability to align federal and provincial actors without institutional bias. When coordinating bodies are also participants in the operational domain, issues of turf, ownership and institutional primacy inevitably arise, particularly in relation to civilian federal agencies and provincial counterterrorism departments.

The result is a fragmented response architecture. Information may be shared, but policy coherence remains weak. Provincial counterterrorism departments, already operating under capacity constraints, lack a consistent national framework to align with, while civilian oversight appears increasingly marginalised. At the moment, Pakistan risks continuing with reactive measures rather than a unified national strategy.

Compounding this institutional weakness is the ambiguity surrounding the policy framework itself. The revised National Action Plan (NAP), now being pursued under the banner of Azme-Istehkam, is presented as the central roadmap for counterterrorism. However, a closer examination reveals that it largely consists of broad, abstract objectives rather than an actionable strategy. It does not clearly specify who is responsible for what, nor does it establish time-bound targets or measurable benchmarks.

Without clearly assigned responsibilities and timelines, even well-intentioned policy goals risk remaining aspirational. In effect, Pakistan has a declared policy direction in the shape of the National Prevention of Violent Extremism Policy of 2024, but lacks an execution framework.

What is needed instead is a truly holistic national policy – one that places economic security at its core, recognising that instability, unemployment and regional disparities create fertile

ground for both ideological militancy and political insurgency. This must be complemented by integrated efforts in internal security, social development and foreign policy, particularly in managing relations with Afghanistan. Counterterrorism cannot succeed in isolation from these broader state functions.

In the case of religious militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan is engaged in a war of ideas as much as a war of arms. Groups like the TTP and Islamic State Khorasan draw strength from narratives of religious legitimacy, anti-state rhetoric and exploitation of governance gaps. Yet the state's counter-narrative remains weak and fragmented. It relies mainly on the Pyam e Pakistan fatwa which declares suicide bombing and killing of innocent persons as unIslamic but is silent on telling the youth that the concept of nation-states and developments in social sectors are in accordance with the injunctions of Islam. The recent use of labels of Fitna al Khawarij and Fitna al Hind seems to be a step in the right direction, but the neglected area of madrassa reforms still provides spaces of radicalisation.

In Balochistan, the limitations of a kinetic first approach are even more evident. Political grievances cannot be resolved solely through force. While security operations may suppress insurgent activity, they do little to address the underlying causes that sustain it. Development initiatives, often presented as solutions, struggle to gain legitimacy when local populations feel excluded from decision-making or perceive benefits as externally driven.

The absence of meaningful political dialogue, transparent resource-sharing mechanisms, and empowered local governance structures continues to widen the trust deficit. As history repeatedly shows, sub-nationalist insurgencies rarely end without political accommodation.

Recent indications of a more assertive posture, including cross-border strikes into Afghanistan, reflect growing frustration within Pakistan's security establishment. However, escalation without a parallel diplomatic and political strategy carries significant risks and regional tensions, civilian fallout, and further radicalisation. More importantly, it does not address the core drivers of militancy, ideology, governance deficits and political exclusion.

A coherent and holistic counterterrorism strategy is urgently needed, one that clearly distinguishes between the nature of threats and aligns responses accordingly. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this means pairing precise security operations with a robust ideological counteroffensive, improved policing and better governance. In Balochistan, it requires a shift from a security-led to a politically led approach, grounded in dialogue, inclusion, and fairness.

At the national level, restoring Nacta's authority, moving beyond abstract formulations in the revised National Action Plan and translating Azm e Istehkam into a time-bound, executable framework are no longer optional but urgent necessities. The choice now is stark: continue managing violence through episodic force or confront its causes through a coherent national strategy? Without that shift, the state risks remaining locked in a cycle in which tactical victories are repeatedly overtaken by strategic failure.

SOURCE: THE NEWS, MARCH 20, 2026

Pakistan's Security Landscape In 2025

AAMIR ZULFIQAR KHAN



In the fog of the ongoing USA–Israel–Iran war, an important report highlighting the scale and ramifications of terrorism in Pakistan has largely gone unnoticed.

The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) is an independent, non-profit think tank headquartered in Sydney, Australia, that measures peace as a tangible, data-driven component of human development. Founded in 2007 by Steve Killelea, it produces globally recognised indices—like the “Global Peace Index (GPI)” and “Global Terrorism Index (GTI)” – to calculate the economic value of peace and analyse factors that sustain it.

A rating from the IEP, primarily through the GPI and GTI, is crucial for a country because it acts as a comprehensive, data-driven benchmark of its stability, safety, and economic viability on the global stage. Covering 163 nations and 99.7% of the world's population, this rating directly influences foreign investment, economic policy, and international reputation.

The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2026 was officially released on 21 March 2026. For the first time, Pakistan was ranked as the most “terrorism-impacted” country globally. Sub-Saharan Africa was identified as the epicentre of terrorism, accounting for 48% of all global terrorism deaths.

It notes that in 2025, Pakistan recorded 1,139 deaths and 1,045 incidents, the highest levels seen since 2013. This is part of a consistent, six-fold increase in terror activity since 2020. It signifies a worrying trend and a serious challenge to the country because, overall, global terrorism deaths and incidents have fallen to their lowest levels since 2007.

In another report by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), Pakistan recorded around 1,700+ terrorist incidents in 2025, with fatalities close to 4,000, making it the most violent year since 2013.

It is necessary to understand that international investors generally view any country with a high position on the GTI as a high-risk market, leading to a significant negative impact on foreign direct investment (FDI) and capital flows. The basic reason is the investors' fear of an increased threat to physical and human assets.

Terrorism creates uncertainty, reducing the expected return on capital and prompting investors to move assets to safer countries. Investment, particularly in sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, and infrastructure, suffers disproportionately in countries facing high terrorist activity.

Violence also has a direct and significant negative impact on GDP growth by damaging infrastructure and disrupting economic activities. Governments are forced to shift resources from education, infrastructure, and social development to defence and security, hindering productive economic growth.

Research shows that the negative impact on economic growth is up to three times greater in low-income countries compared to high-income countries due to weaker institutional capacity to manage the crisis.

Terrorism also hinders international trade by affecting supply chains, increasing the cost of doing business, and slowing the flow of capital across borders.

In summary, high GTI scores directly correlate with economic instability, capital flight, and diminished economic prospects. The impact is most severe for developing nations, where the cost of security can drain already limited resources.

According to the report, in 2025, Pakistan faced a "deadliest" resurgence by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The threat landscape is characterised by high-intensity attacks concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, with safe havens and training camps in Afghanistan.

TTP attacks increased by 24% in 2025 compared to 2024, with nearly 600 attacks causing over 500 deaths, making it one of the most lethal groups globally. Under the leadership of Noor Wali Mehsud, the group is active in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and tribal districts, using guerrilla tactics, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and complex attacks.

As mentioned above, TTP operates with relative impunity from Afghan territory, taking advantage of the Taliban's control in Afghanistan, which has led to high tensions and cross-border skirmishes between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The second on the terrorist list is the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) & Majeed Brigade. Balochistan has seen a surge in violence in 2025, from separatist groups targeting security forces, Chinese interests, and infrastructure projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). They also have safe havens in Afghanistan and indulge in violence against Pakistan without any fear of reprisal from their host country.

While sustaining some setbacks in 2025, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) remains a significant threat capable of conducting high-impact attacks. ISKP continued to operate in Balochistan and KP, claiming responsibility for attacks like the April 2025 Mastung bus bombing, which targeted security personnel. They target both security forces and civilians, often with a sectarian dimension.

Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), which is a powerful TTP faction responsible for high-profile suicide attacks in urban areas, such as the November 2025 Islamabad court bombing, remains active.

Similarly, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) continues to be a key player in sectarian violence, often collaborating with the Taliban, according to security officials.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan are the two provinces which accounted for over 90% of the country's violence in 2025, with KP being the worst-hit region.

The harsh reality is that despite Pakistan having acted as a Muslim brother to Afghans, hosting nearly 5 million refugees since 1979 and providing support to them, Afghanistan, after 2021, slowly slid into becoming a sanctuary for terrorists inimical to Pakistan.

Despite numerous correspondences between the two countries and parleys held between them, with friendly countries like China, Türkiye, and Qatar providing the diplomatic platform, Afghanistan has not taken any concrete measures to eliminate the terrorist sanctuaries. Resultantly, innocent Pakistanis have been martyred by this terrorism, apparently with the tacit approval of the Taliban government.

In view of the above facts, what recourse was available to Pakistan, except to act against the terrorists by launching Operation Azm-e-Istehkam and label them as Fitna al-Khawarij? Which country, worth its salt, can stand the killing of its citizens through an insurgency and extreme violence inflicted by terrorist organisations having sanctuaries in another country?

The road to diplomacy is always open and welcome, but until an earnest, verifiable effort is witnessed from the Taliban government heeding Pakistan's genuine demands, the route to kinetic operations will likely continue in the foreseeable future.

The evidence is unambiguous. Pakistan is confronting a renewed and evolving terrorism landscape, with a direct impact on the lives of its citizens. Its response also needs to be equally adaptive and resolute.

Kinetic measures provide respite, but they are not the final solution. Regional cooperation on a unified response to terrorism needs to evolve. Internal capacity – policing, development, and other contours of governance – needs to be strengthened to ensure an inclusive, unified body politic of Pakistan.

The time to wake up is now.

SOURCE: THE FRIDAY TIMES, MARCH 27, 2026

FIA director general says agency has compiled data of human smugglers, facilitators



ISLAMABAD: Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Director General Dr Usman Anwar said the agency had compiled a comprehensive data of individuals involved in human smuggling. This was disclosed in a detailed briefing to Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, who visited the FIA headquarters.

The FIA director general said a transparent and effective accountability system had been developed within the organisation. He said that in this regard, working groups and coordination committees were being established with other agencies.

He said modern technology was being utilised to ensure effective action against immigration-related crimes, human smuggling and money laundering.

Speaking on the occasion, Naqvi ordered a comprehensive crackdown against corruption in government institutions and directed that, in line with the prime minister's vision, a zero-tolerance policy against corruption be strictly enforced across all public sector organisations.

The interior minister said that the reform process in the FIA would be completed by December. He added that all online advertisements offering overseas employment should be monitored and that public awareness should be ensured regarding misleading advertisements.

The interior minister emphasised that the FIA would be organised as a frontline force against all forms of organised crime, and assured full support to the agency at every level in this regard.

During the visit, Naqvi also inspected the ongoing infrastructure improvement projects. He directed that the ongoing construction activities be completed at the earliest.

During the last four months of 2025, the FIA punished 214 officials amid rising complaints of human trafficking and corruption. The agency dismissed 76 officials from service, demoted nine to lower ranks, sacked two others and awarded punishments to 127 others.

SOURCE: DAWN, MARCH 28, 2026

March sees 35pc decline in terrorism fatalities, coinciding with Operation Ghazab lil-Haq: PICSS



Security forces on patrol in Balochistan.

A significant reduction of 35 per cent in combat-related fatalities was recorded across Pakistan during the month of March, coinciding with Operation Ghazab lil-Haq, according to monthly statistics released by a think tank.

Data released by Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) showed that a total of 331 people were killed in March compared to 506 in February, marking a 35pc decline in overall combat-related deaths.

PICSS also observed a decline in high-profile militant attacks, even as the overall number of attacks increased during the month.

It noted that the reduction in human losses coincided with Pakistan's cross-border military strikes under Operation Ghazab lil-Haq, which began in the last week of February and targeted terrorist positions in Afghanistan.

"The timing suggests these operations may have contributed to disrupting militant capacity and reducing the lethality of attacks," the report noted.

It added that in response to these strikes, groups including Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jamaatul Ahrar, and Ittihadul Mujahideen – an umbrella alliance comprising Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, Lashkar-i-Islam, and Inquilab-i-Islami Pakistan – announced an escalation in attacks against Pakistan.

“Despite this surge in militant activity, the overall impact remained comparatively limited, as reflected in the sharp decline in casualties,” PICSS stated.

Data collected by PICSS showed that civilian fatalities dropped sharply from 132 in February to 39 in March, reflecting a 70pc decrease.

Security forces’ fatalities declined from 80 to 59, a 26pc reduction, while militant deaths also fell from 294 to 228, representing a 22pc decline.

PICSS further reported a 37pc decrease in overall injuries, with 210 people injured in March compared to 333 in February. Injuries among security personnel slightly declined from 50 to 48.

At the same time, militant injuries rose significantly from 24 to 57, marking a 138pc increase.

“Civilian injuries saw the most notable improvement, dropping from 259 to 98, a 62pc decrease,” the think tank pointed out.

However, March also witnessed a rise in attacks on pro-government peace committee members, with five killed and seven injured compared to none in February.

“While the overall impact of violence against the state declined, militant groups increased the frequency of their activities, largely shifting towards low-intensity operations.

PICSS recorded 146 militant attacks in March compared to 83 in February. Suicide attacks dropped from five in February to just one in March.

During the month, security forces arrested 41 suspected militants, while militants kidnapped 19 individuals.

Province-wise breakdown

Providing a province-wise breakdown, PICSS said 189 overall combat-related deaths were recorded in Balochistan in March compared to 285 in February, reflecting a 34pc reduction.

Civilian deaths dropped from 82 to 17, marking a 79pc decline. Militant fatalities decreased from 176 in February to 145 in March, while security forces’ losses remained unchanged at 27 personnel.

The number of wounded security personnel increased from four to 19, while militant injuries also surged sharply from zero to 47, and civilian injuries increased from 12 to 19.

Militants kidnapped eight individuals in the province, while security forces arrested 26 suspected militants during the month.

The merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (erstwhile Fata) recorded 55 combat-related deaths in March compared to 95 in February, a 42pc decline, the PICSS report said.

While security forces fatalities dropped from 23 to 16, the number of militants eliminated also declined sharply from 62 to 24, a 61pc decrease. Civilian deaths, however, rose from 10 to 13.

Similar to Balochistan, injuries in the region increased significantly, rising from 33 in February to 92 in March. Security personnel injuries increased from four to 15, militant injuries from three to eight, and civilian injuries from 26 to 69.

The region also witnessed seven abductions, and the only suicide bombing of the month was reported from the area.

In mainland KP, overall fatalities remained largely unchanged, with 83 deaths recorded in March compared to 81 in February.

While the number of security forces martyred dropped notably from 27 to 16, civilian deaths increased from six to nine. At the same time, militant deaths rose from 48 to 55.

Contrary to trends in Balochistan and erstwhile Fata, injuries in mainland KP declined significantly from 104 in February to 33 in March, PICSS observed.

Security forces' injuries dropped from 35 to 14, civilian injuries from 48 to 10, and militant injuries from 21 to two.

"However, peace committee members suffered three deaths and seven injuries compared to none in February, indicating a shift by militants towards softer targets amid heightened security vigilance," the report noted.

While Punjab reported no militant attacks in March, security forces killed four militants in an operation.

In comparison, February saw three militants and two security personnel killed, while one security personnel and four civilians were injured. No injuries were reported in Punjab during March.

Similarly, no militant attacks were reported from Sindh, though security forces arrested eight suspected militants.

In February, security forces had killed four militants and arrested one in the province.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, one attempted militant attack on a security check post near the Diamer-Bhasha Dam was reported. However, the attack was thwarted by security forces, and no casualties were recorded.

In 2025, Pakistan ranked number one on the Global Terrorism Index for the first time, recording a six per cent increase in terrorism-related deaths (1,139), a recent report showed.

The report noted it was the "sixth consecutive year" in which Pakistan witnessed a surge in terrorism deaths. It also observed a "slight decline" in the total number of terror attacks in 2025.

SOURCE: DAWN, APRIL 1, 2026



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