



Pakistan Institute for Conflict
and Security Studies

Pakistan's

COMPREHENSIVE
NATIONAL SECURITY
PROFILE

2023

ABOUT PICSS

Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) is an Islamabad-based independent think tank specialized in studying terrorism and extremism in the region of South Asia including Afghanistan. PICSS is registered as a trust (not for profit) under Trust Act 1882 (see Annex-A).

Apart from conducting field researches, PICSS maintains a robust data about anti-State violence in Pakistan since 9/11. Through PICSS Militancy Database one can obtain statistics of violent incidents related to anti-State armed conflicts in Pakistan for any district of Pakistan since 9/11. The database is updated regularly on daily basis. Since January 2021, PICSS has also expanded its data collection of anti-State violence in entire South Asia including Afghanistan. PICSS also issues weekly, monthly and yearly security assessment reports which are available on subscription.

PICSS has conducted many field research projects on topics related to its main area of expertise. It also plays an active role in terms of countering the growing extremism and radicalisation within the country. It launched 'Pakistaniat' initiative in 2018, which enables maximum social inclusion particularly bringing the youth of Pakistan to the mainstream by conducting seminars, dialogs, conferences, and webinars. Pakistaniat initiative helps facilitate maximum social inclusion on a national level platform where key national stakeholders are invited to participate in discussions and add value to certain conflicting and extremist subject matters that becomes a contribution to the youth awareness and engagement on a strategic level.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJK	Azad Jammu & Kashmir
Arst	Arrested by Security Forces
C	Civilian
CBA	Cross Border Attack
CrK	Cracker Attack
FATA	Federally Administrated Tribal Areas
FC	Frontier Corps, para-military force
GB	Gilgit-Baltistan
GrA	Grenade Attack
IB	Intelligence Bureau
IED	Improvised Explosive Device or Handmade bombs
ICT	Islamabad Capital Territory
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
ISPR	Inter-Services Public Relations
JuD	Jamat-ud-Dawah
JeM	Jaish-e-Muhammad
KP, KPK	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
K, KK	Kidnapping; Kidnapping and Killing
Kdnp	Kidnappings by Militants
LeJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
LeJA	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Almi
LOC	Line of Control
M	Militant
MA	Militants' (Physical) Assault, guerilla attack
MAs	Militant Attacks
MC	Militant Clash
MrA	Mortar Attack
NACTA	National Counter Terrorism Authority
NAP	National Action Plan
NDS	National Directorate of Security
Nos	Number of Incidents
PAF	Pakistan Air Force
PGR, RZ, R	Razakar (Pro-government tribal militias)
RA	Rocket Attack
RAW	Research & Analysis Wing
SA	Suicide Attack
SFAs	Security Forces Actions
SFP	Security Forces Personnel
SRA	Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army
TK	Targeted Killing
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or Pakistani Taliban
TTP-JA, JuA	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Jamat ul Ahrar

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Director Research
Gul Dad

5 Janaury 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan faced multiple challenges during 2023 including deteriorating security situation, worsening economy and one of the worst political turmoil. The country witnessed another year of an unprecedented surge in militant attacks as the country saw a staggering 70 percent rise in attacks, an 81 percent increase in resultant deaths, and a 62 percent surge in the number of wounded. Pakistani security forces foiled hundreds of potential attacks otherwise the situation could have been even worse. At least 612 militants were killed and 645 were arrested during the year. Level of anti-State violence has gone up to the 2015 as the highest number of suicide attacks were reported in 2023 since 2014 while average militant attack per month also reached to 54, the highest in any year after 2015.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan remained the most affected provinces but violence also increased in Punjab and Sindh. The year saw visible attempts by the militants to affect the security situation in Punjab especially districts adjacent to southern districts of KP. Assassination of leaders and members of Kashmir focussed groups also increased in 2023 further compounding security challenge for Pakistan. The authority blamed Indian intelligence RAW for these attacks. Growing ingress of alleged Indian-sponsored operations posed a major challenge for the country.

Pakistan has gone through a worse political turmoil as assemblies two provinces, Punjab and KP were dissolved in anticipation of early elections by the then ruling PTI but this move resulted in further aggravating political crisis which had begun in March 2022 with the no confidence motion in the National Assembly against the then Prime Minister Imran Khan and his subsequent ouster from power in April 2022. Despite Supreme Court's orders elections could not be held and eventually they are going to be held on February 8, 2024 along with National Assembly and all other provincial assemblies. Clouds of doubts still hover over the prospects of the elections.

On the economic front Pakistan faced tough challenges as chances of default were looming large. After months of negotiations the country was able to secure another IMF bail out package.

In 2023, Pakistan faced severe economic challenges, teetering on the brink of default. The issues included prolonged negotiations with the IMF, currency depreciation, soaring inflation, and credit downgrades. Despite initial resistance, Pakistan accepted stringent IMF conditions, leading to a rapid depreciation of the rupee and interest rate hikes. Political debates over IMF-demanded taxes triggered credit downgrades, and inflation surged. Rumors of IMF demands related to nuclear programs were firmly rejected. While guarantees from Saudi Arabia and the UAE provided some relief, the risk of default increased.

Repatriation of illegal Afghan citizens in the wake of mounting TTP attacks and unwillingness of the interim Afghan government to address Pakistan's concerns strained Pak-Afghan relations towards the end of the year. Pakistan's relations with the US, China, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qata and Kuwait witnessed positive trajectory primarily due to the military diplomacy led by COAS General Asim Munir. Military's special efforts to boost economy and support the government's initiatives to curb smuggling and illegal cross border trade also produced some positive results as Pakistan's stock market was booming towards the end of the year while exchange rate for Pakistani currency was also under control.

NATIONAL SECURITY PROFILE 2023 (Statistical Overview)

Abdullah Khan, Gul Dad & Muhammad Shaeer Khan

Pakistan has witnessed surge in anti-state and related violence in 2023. At least 1529 people lost their lives including 508 security forces personnel, 409 civilians and 612 militants and 1442 got injured including 671 security forces personnel, 644 civilians and 127 militants in 1016 violent incidents during the year. These incidents include militant attacks and security forces actions as shown in Table-1. To better understand the security dynamics militant attacks(MAs) and security forces actions (SFAs) are discussed separately in detail.

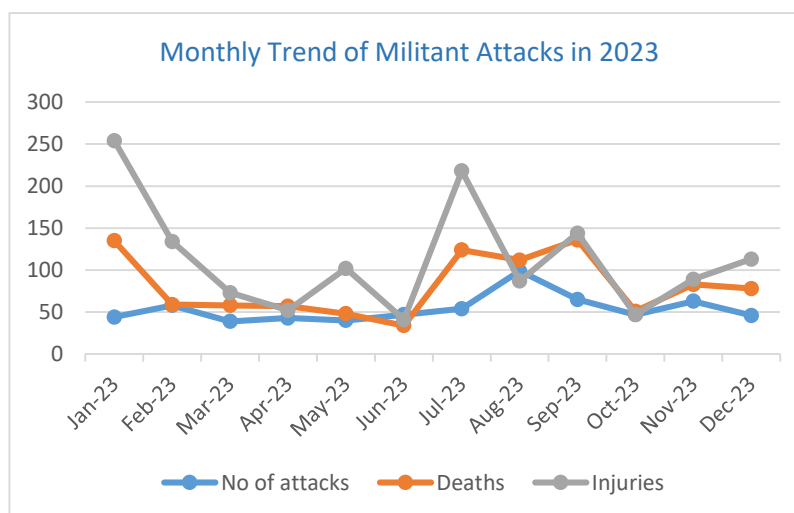
TABLE 1: OVERALL VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN IN 2023

Category	Nos	Killed					Injured					Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	PGR	M	C	Total	SFP	PGR	M	C	Total		
MAs	645	438	0	133	405	976	655	0	56	643	1354	5	34
SFAs	371	70	0	479	4	553	16	0	71	1	88	640	0
Total	1016	508	0	612	409	1529	671	0	127	644	1442	645	34

Countrywide Militant Attacks

The security landscape in Pakistan experienced a pronounced deterioration in 2023, marked by a notable escalation in militant activities. Throughout the year, the nation bore witness to 645 militant attacks, resulting in the tragic loss of 976 lives and leaving 1354 others injured. In stark contrast to the preceding year of 2022, where 380 militant attacks resulted in 539 fatalities and 836 injuries, the year 2023 exhibited a worrisome 70 percent surge in militant incidents, an 81 percent spike in fatalities, and a 62 percent increase in injuries.

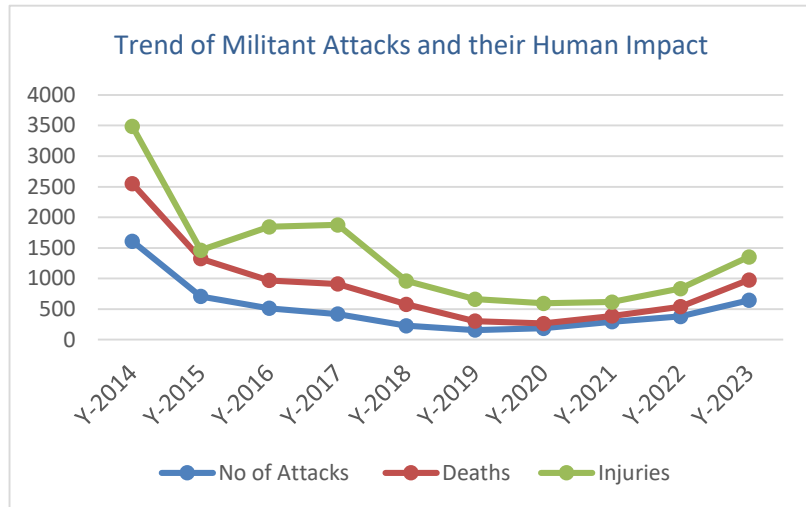
This unprecedented rise, compared to the relatively modest uptick in 2022 (30 percent increase in attacks, 39 percent increase in deaths, and almost 36 percent increase in injuries), signifies a phenomenal escalation in both the frequency of militant attacks and their resultant human toll in 2023. This disconcerting trend appears poised to persist into the coming year, as projections indicate a likelihood of continued violence throughout 2024.



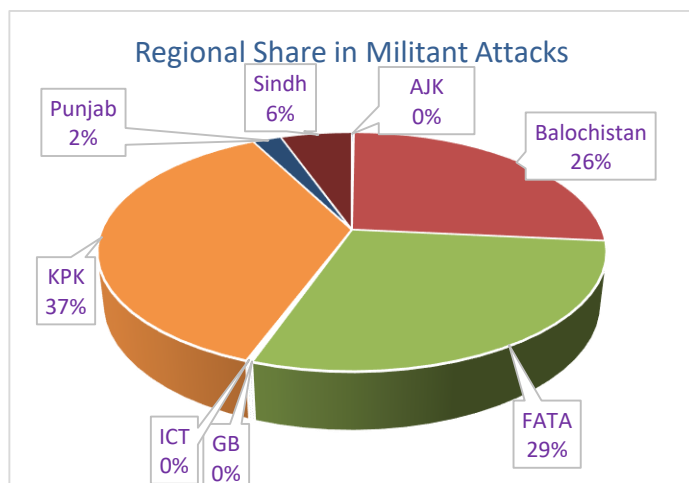
Illustrated by the accompanying graph, a discernible shift in the trajectory of violence occurred post-2019, transitioning from a consistent reduction to an accelerating increase. The average monthly tally of militant attacks surged from approximately 32 incidents per month in 2022 to nearly 54 per month in 2023. Anticipations suggest a further exacerbation of violence in 2024, particularly in the proximity of the scheduled general elections slated for February 2024.

In terms of the monthly trajectory, January marked a significant peak in fatalities and injuries, attributable to 44 militant attacks, including a suicide bombing at the police lines in Peshawar. However, August emerged as the most turbulent month, witnessing a record 99 militant attacks—the highest monthly tally since November 2014. During this period, 112 individuals lost their lives, and 87 others sustained injuries.

The months of July, August, and September stood out for elevated casualties. In July, the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) claimed responsibility for a suicide attack at the JUI-F workers' convention in the Bajaur district of the former FATA region, resulting in 64 fatalities and 123 injuries. In September, ISKP was suspected of perpetrating another lethal suicide attack in a mosque in the Mastung district of Balochistan. Simultaneously, the group claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing on the same day at a mosque near police quarters in the Hangu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). December witnessed a suicide attack in DI Khan targeting the Pakistan Army, with Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan claiming responsibility. For a comprehensive examination of attack modalities, including suicide attacks, and an in-depth analysis of militant groups, the subsequent sections of this report offer detailed insights.



The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP/KPK) emerged as the most severely impacted region, with militants orchestrating 423 attacks that resulted in the loss of 621 lives and injuries to 980 individuals. Within KP, mainland KP bore the brunt of 237 attacks, leading to 336 fatalities and 591 injuries, while the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region, now merged districts, witnessed 186 attacks causing 285 deaths and 389 injuries. Consequently, mainland KP and ex-FATA regions collectively accounted for 37 percent and 29 percent of the total attacks in Pakistan, respectively.



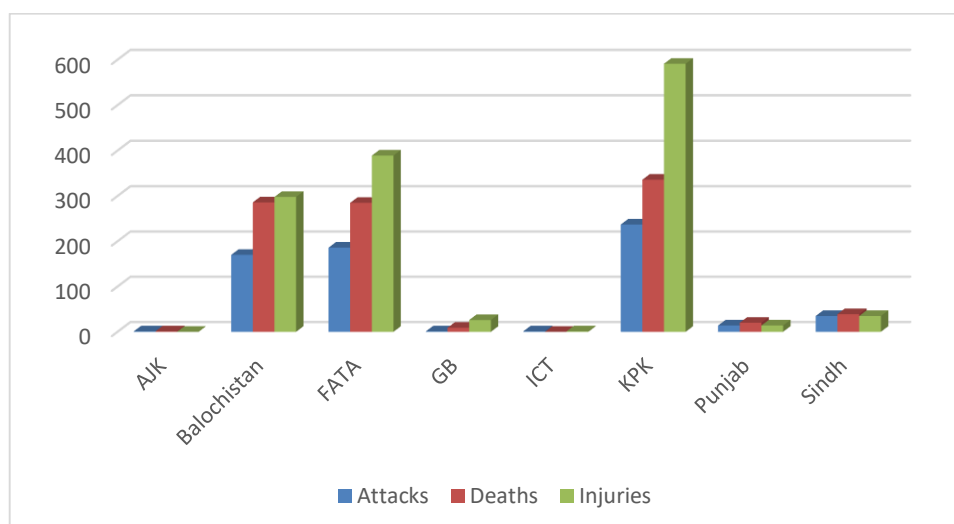
Balochistan experienced 170 militant attacks, comprising 26 percent of the total attacks nationwide, resulting in 286 fatalities and 298 injuries. Sindh reported 35 militant attacks, constituting nearly six percent of the total attacks in the country, claiming 39 lives and injuring 35 others. Punjab documented 14 militant attacks, representing almost two percent of the total attacks, resulting in 20 deaths and 14 injuries. Additionally, one militant attack each was reported from Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Gilgit-Baltistan, and Islamabad Capital Territory.

A noteworthy incident in Punjab's Sialkot district involved the targeting of a Jaish-e-Muhammad activist, with the Indian intelligence agency RAW accused of orchestrating the attack. Furthermore, RAW was implicated in an attack in Rawalakot district of AJK, targeting an activist of Jamat-ud-Dawah. These allegations underscore the geopolitical dimensions influencing the security landscape in the region.

TABLE 2: REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF MILITANT ATTACKS IN 2023

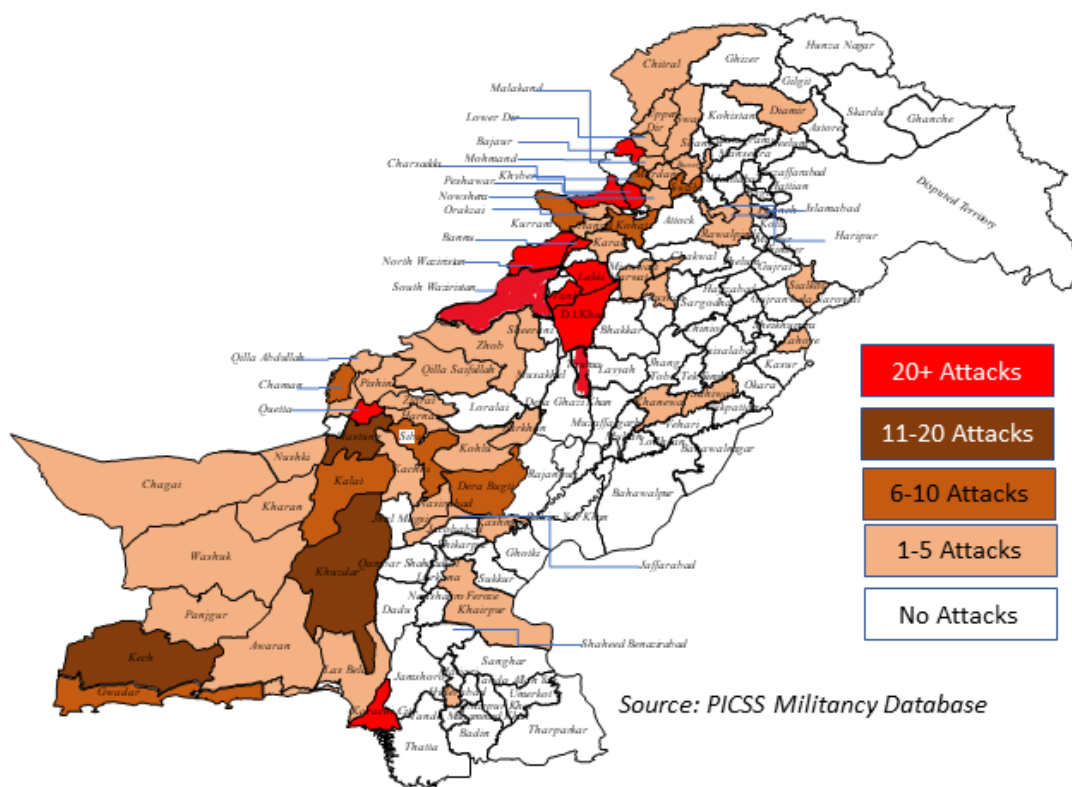
Region	Attacks	Killed					Injured					Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
KPK	237	213	0	56	67	336	383	0	43	165	591	1	11
FATA	186	94	0	36	155	285	142	0	7	240	389	4	6
Balochistan	170	114	0	21	151	286	99	0	4	195	298	0	15
Sindh	35	11	0	6	22	39	24	0	1	10	35	0	2
Punjab	14	4	0	14	2	20	5	0	1	8	14	0	0
AJK	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GB	1	2	0	0	7	9	1	0	0	25	26	0	0
ICT	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	645	438	0	133	405	976	655	0	56	643	1354	5	34

Figure 1: Geographical distribution of Militant Attacks and their impact – 2023

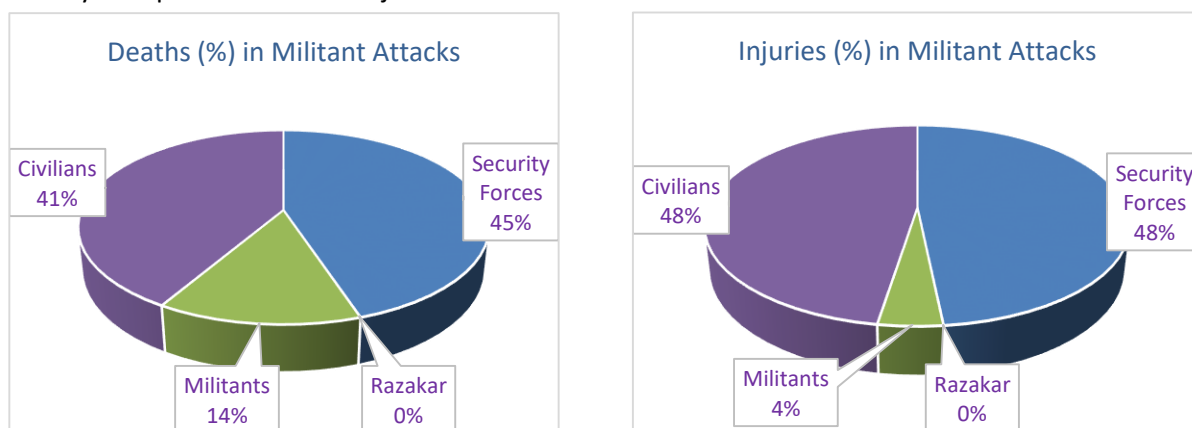


As depicted on the map (see Figure-2), the geographical distribution of violence exhibited a concentration in areas proximate to the western border. The districts most severely impacted, witnessing over 20 militant attacks, included Bajaur in the North, alongside Khyber and Peshawar districts in central Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Furthermore, southern districts such as Lakki Marwat, DI Khan, Bannu, and North and South Waziristan were notably affected. In Sindh, violence predominantly centered around the provincial capital, Karachi. Meanwhile, Balochistan's Quetta emerged as the most embattled district, with additional instances of violence observed in Kech, Gwadar, Khuzdar, Mastung, and Zhob districts. This spatial pattern underscores the regionalized nature of the security challenges, with distinct hotspots characterizing various provinces and districts.

FIGURE 2: MILITANCY AFFECTED DISTRICTS IN PAKISTAN – 2023



Out of the 976 casualties resulting from militant attacks, a notable proportion comprised security forces personnel, accounting for 45 percent of the total deaths (438 personnel), whereas civilians constituted 41 percent (405 individuals). Militants themselves comprised 14 percent of the fatalities in these attacks. Regarding the 1,354 individuals injured over the course of the year, security forces personnel constituted a significant segment, comprising almost 48 percent (655 personnel), while civilians accounted for an equivalent share of approximately 48 percent (643 individuals). Merely four percent of those injured were identified as militants.



As a discernible trend, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliated groups were observed to specifically target security forces, predominantly focusing on policemen, police stations, and check-posts. Conversely, the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) demonstrated a more indiscriminate approach in its attacks, targeting both civilians and security forces. However, it is noteworthy that the

share of civilian casualties remained comparatively higher in ISKP-led incidents, highlighting a concerning aspect of their tactics.

Analysis of Type of Attacks

The categorization of militant attacks by PICSS encompasses eight overarching classifications. The primary aim of this categorization is to systematically examine and analyze the operational proficiencies of militant entities, as well as discern their favoured tactical approaches in advancing their violent objectives. Table 2 illustrates that raids and ambushes (MAs) emerged as the predominant modus operandi among these entities. Notably, suicide attacks, despite constituting a lesser frequency, inflicted the highest toll in terms of human casualties, causing 329 fatalities and 582 injuries. Raids and ambushes, although less lethal, occupied the second position among the deadliest categories. Concurrently, a discernible escalation in the incidence of target killings was observed. A detailed discussion of the major types of attacks is given as under:

TABLE 3: TYPE OF ATTACKS IN PAKISTAN IN 2023

Type	Nos	Killed					Injured					M Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
MA	249	170	0	83	62	315	191	0	55	115	361	4	2
TK	155	68	0	4	109	181	1	0	1	20	22	0	0
IED	114	38	0	2	72	112	92	0	0	167	259	0	0
GrA	58	1	0	1	7	9	30	0	0	74	104	0	0
SA	29	157	0	42	130	329	340	0	0	242	582	1	0
K	25	3	0	0	13	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	32
RA	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	15	16	0	0
MrA	7	1	0	0	12	13	0	0	0	10	10	0	0
Total	645	438	0	132	405	975	655	0	56	643	1354	5	34

Suicide Attacks in 2023

In the year 2023, the nation underwent a disconcerting escalation in the frequency of suicide attacks, reaching the highest level recorded since 2014. A notable surge in such incidents manifested, with 29 documented suicide attacks, resulting in a grievous toll of 329 lives lost and 582 individuals sustaining injuries. This figure represents the most substantial loss of life since 2013 when 683 casualties occurred in the context of 47 suicide bombings.

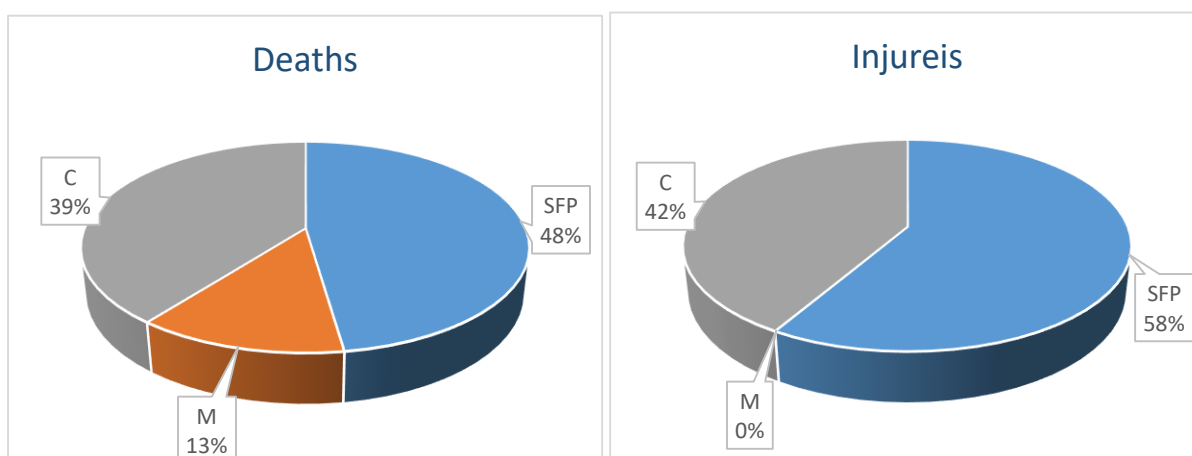
A comparative analysis of the data from the previous year, 2022, reveals an alarming 93 per cent increase in the incidence of suicide attacks, an astonishing 226 per cent surge in associated fatalities, and a troubling 101 per cent upswing in the number of individuals injured. Furthermore, the proportional contribution of suicide attacks to the overall tally of incidents rose from 3.9 per cent in 2022 to 4.7 per cent in 2023, underscoring the gravity of the prevailing circumstances.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa bore the brunt of these attacks, documenting 23 instances that resulted in 254 fatalities and 512 injuries. Within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Newly Merged Districts (NMD), formerly designated as FATA, witnessed 13 suicide attacks, resulting in 85 deaths and 206 injuries. Mainland KP witnessed 10 suicide attacks causing death to 169 people and injuring 308 others. Balochistan, in contrast, experienced five such attacks, leading to 67 deaths and 52 injuries, while Sindh reported one suicide attack that resulted in eight fatalities and 18 injuries.

Table 4: Province-wise distribution of suicide attacks in Pakistan in 2023

Province	No	Deaths					Injured				
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total
FATA	13	14	0	12	59	85	43	0	0	163	206
KP	10	128	0	23	18	169	265	0	0	41	306
Baluchistan	5	11	0	4	52	67	15	0	0	37	52
Sindh	1	4	0	3	1	8	17	0	0	1	18
	29	157	0	42	130	329	340	0	0	242	582

The disconcerting data additionally discloses that security forces emerged as the principal targets of these attacks, with civilians constituting the second-largest demographic of victims. A graphical representation in the form of pie charts elucidates that 48 per cent of fatalities and 58 per cent of injuries were sustained by personnel affiliated with security forces.



Analysing the historical trajectory, scrutiny of the militancy database maintained by PICSS reveals a discernible reduction in the incidence of suicide attacks, declining from 30 instances in 2014 to a meagre three in 2019. Contrary to the preceding assertion, there was no marked upswing in 2020 and 2021, as both years documented a modest four attacks each. However, the year 2022 witnessed an abrupt and substantial surge, documenting 15 attacks that resulted in 101 fatalities and 290 injuries. This disconcerting trend persisted into 2023, culminating in a new pinnacle with 29 reported suicide attacks.

Table 5: Suicide Attacks in Pakistan (from 2014-2023)

Year	No of SAs	Total Attacks	Share of SAs in Total Attacks	Deaths	Injuries
Y-2014	30	1609	1.9%	282	562
Y-2015	20	710	2.8%	254	446
Y-2016	17	513	3.3%	327	887
Y-2017	23	420	5.5%	299	799
Y-2018	18	229	7.9%	267	460
Y-2019	10	147	6.8%	70	141
Y-2020	4	188	2.1%	26	43
Y-2021	4	294	1.4%	15	41
Y-2022	15	380	3.9%	101	290
Y-2023	29	623	4.7%	329	582

Analysis of Pattern of Guerrilla Attacks/Militant Assaults in 2023

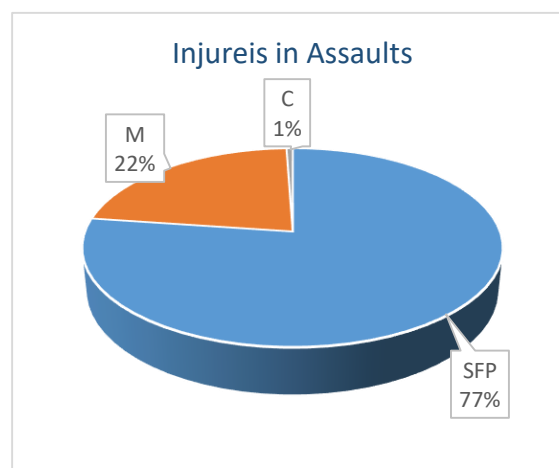
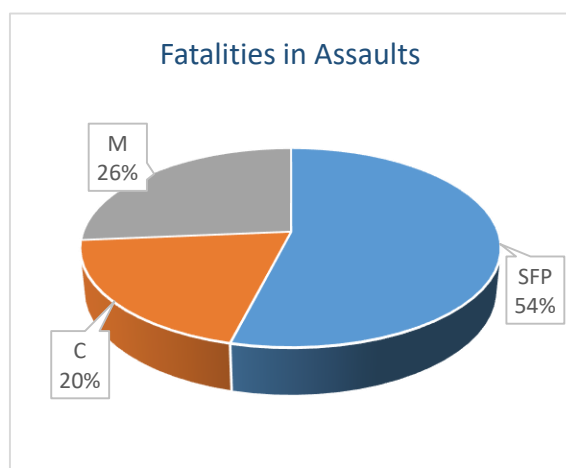
Incidents wherein multiple militants participate in a raid or ambush, engaging in direct combat are cataloged by PICSS as Militant (Physical) Assaults or MA. In the year 2023, there was a noteworthy 122 per cent escalation in guerrilla attacks in comparison to the preceding year, 2022. The fatality rate witnessed a surge of 45 per cent, while the count of injured individuals exhibited a substantial increase of 196 per cent. Specifically, in 2022, 112 such attacks were documented, resulting in the demise of 217 individuals and injuries to 122, whereas this year, in 2023, 249 such assaults, culminating in 315 fatalities and 361 injuries were recorded. Due to access to modern/ sophisticated weapons, the capacity of the militant groups has increased manifold to indulge in such attacks.

The tabular representation below delineates that the majority of these physical assaults were reported from the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), closely followed by Balochistan.

TABLE 6: PROVINCE-WISE BREAKUP OF MAS IN 2023

Region	No	Deaths					Injured					Arrest	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
KP	108	43	0	32	10	85	80	0	43	37	160	1	2
FATA	70	48	0	23	14	85	59	0	7	30	96	3	0
Balochistan	56	73	0	15	30	118	46	0	4	22	72	0	0
Panjab	9	2	0	12	1	15	3	0	0	1	4	0	0
Sindh	4	2	0	1	0	3	1	0	1	0	2	0	0
ICT	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
GB	1	2	0	0	7	9	1	0	0	25	26	0	0
Total	249	170	0	83	62	315	191	0	55	115	361	4	2

Prominent instances of guerrilla attacks in 2023 include the targeted assault on Mianwali Air Base on November 4, and an ambush on a Pakistan Army convoy in Pasni on November 3, resulting in the tragic loss of 14 soldiers. Additionally, coordinated attacks occurred in Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, during the first week of September. A noteworthy incident transpired in March 2023, where Brigadier Mustafa Kamal Barki from the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) succumbed to the attack, and seven soldiers sustained injuries, with two of them in critical condition, in the region of South Waziristan.



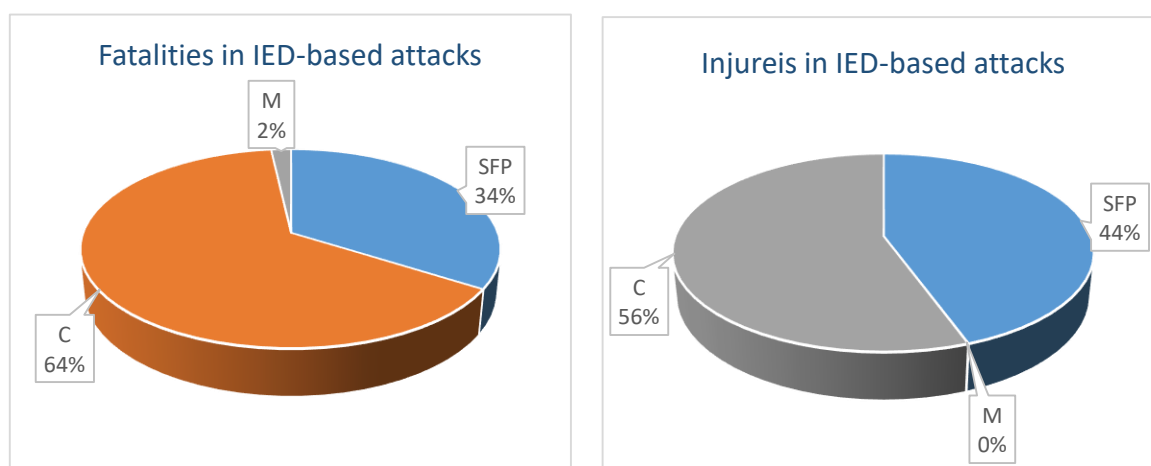
IED-Based Attacks and their Impact in 2023

The country experienced a notable surge of 58 per cent in attacks facilitated by Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in 2023, accompanied by a concurrent 75 per cent increase in associated fatalities. The most devastating IED incident of the year occurred in North Waziristan on August 19, claiming the lives of 11 impoverished labourers when their vehicle inadvertently encountered an IED. In the same month, Panjgur district in Balochistan witnessed another tragic episode, resulting in the death of seven individuals in an IED-based attack. Subsequently, on August 22, South Waziristan endured the loss of 10 personnel from Pakistan's security forces in a similar IED-induced attack. The tabulated data further illustrates that the highest frequency of IED incidents was reported in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region, succeeded by Balochistan, followed by mainland Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

TABLE 7: PROVINCE-WISE BREAKUP OF IEDs IN 2023

Region	No	Deaths					Injured				
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ2	M2	C	Total
FATA	43	19	0	1	30	50	36	0	0	25	61
Balochistan	38	10	0	1	33	44	29	0	0	90	119
KP	30	9	0	0	8	17	24	0	0	45	69
Sindh	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
Panjab	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	7	7
Total	114	38	0	2	72	112	92	0	0	167	259

Civilians emerged as the primary casualties in IED-based attacks, comprising 64 per cent of the total fatalities and 56 per cent of the total injuries incurred in such incidents in 2023. Pakistani security forces accounted for 34 per cent of the deaths and 35 per cent of the injuries resulting from IED-based attacks.



Target-Killings Incidents

In tandem with other forms of violence, incidents of target killings exhibited an increase in 2023. The country witnessed a surge of 46 per cent in target-killing incidents, accompanied by a 43 per cent rise in associated fatalities. Non-combatants constituted the primary demographic affected by these incidents, with 109 civilians succumbing to target killings. Additionally, 68 members of the

security forces lost their lives. Mainland Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) reported the highest number of such incidents, followed by its tribal districts (formerly known as FATA), and subsequently by Balochistan. A notable trend emerged in Sindh, where a majority of militant attacks in the year were characterized as target killings as out of the total 35 militant attacks documented in 2023, 22 were identified as target killings. The provincial distribution of targeted killings is given in the table below. Access to modern gadgets and sophisticated weapons increased the capability of the militant groups to engage in such types of attacks.

TABLE 8: PROVINCE-WISE BREAKUP OF TARGET-KILLINGS IN 2023

Region	No	Deaths					Injured				
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total
KP	51	31	0	0	26	57	1	0	0	1	2
FATA	42	10	0	0	37	47	0	0	0	7	7
Balochistan	37	20	0	0	28	48	0	0	0	10	10
Sindh	22	5	0	2	17	24	0	0	0	2	2
Panjab	2	2	0	2	0	4	0	0	1	0	1
AJK	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	155	68	0	4	109	181	1	0	1	20	22

Militants extended their targets beyond security forces personnel to encompass individuals from minority groups, including Sikhs in Peshawar, Christians, and individuals affiliated with opposing sects. A noteworthy phenomenon observed in 2023 was the deliberate targeting of members belonging to anti-Indian militant organizations, such as Jamat-ud-Dawah and Jaish-e-Muhammad.

Grenade Throwing Incidents

Grenade throwing, as a form of attack, exhibited a modest reduction during 2023. A total of 58 incidents of grenade throwing were documented by PICSS during the year, resulting in nine fatalities and 104 injuries. In comparison, the preceding year, 2022, recorded 61 such incidents, leading to 13 casualties and 147 injuries. This indicates a marginal decline of five per cent in the number of incidents, along with a more substantial 31 per cent reduction in fatalities and a 29 per cent decrease in injuries. Mainland KP experienced a higher frequency of grenade-throwing attacks compared to the tribal districts. Balochistan, on the other hand, reported the second-highest incidence of grenade throwing during the year. A detailed geographic distribution of these attacks is elucidated in the table below.

TABLE 9: PROVINCE-WISE BREAKUP OF GRAS IN 2023

Region	No	Deaths					Injured				
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total
KP	25	1	0	1	2	4	13	0	0	41	54
Balochistan	24	0	0	0	3	3	8	0	0	28	36
Sindh	4	0	0	0	2	2	3	0	0	5	8
FATA	3	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
Panjab	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Total	58	1	0	1	7	9	30	0	0	74	104

Kidnappings in 2023

Militants employ kidnappings for multifarious purposes, including ransom, blackmail, and other strategic motivations. In the year 2023, a conspicuous surge of 150 per cent in kidnapping incidents was noted in Pakistan. PICSS documented 25 such incidents; however, the actual figure may be higher, given that individuals often refrain from reporting kidnapping occurrences due to apprehensions of reprisals from militant entities. The prevalence of kidnappings was particularly pronounced in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and its tribal districts, although Balochistan also experienced an escalation in such incidents. Tragically, at least 16 individuals lost their lives in connection with these kidnapping events. Notably, kidnapping for ransom as well as extortion are the major sources of income/revenue for the militant groups.

TABLE 10: PROVINCE-WISE BREAKUP OF KIDNAPPINGS IN 2023

Region	No	Deaths					Injured					
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M2	C	Total	Kdn
Balochistan	7	0	0	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	15
FATA	7	2	0	0	5	7	0	0	0	0	0	6
KP	10	1	0	0	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	9
Sindh	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	25	3	0	0	13	16	0	0	0	0	0	32

Most Active Militant Groups in 2023

Analysis of TTP's Activities and Their Impact in 2023

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) continues to represent the foremost and formidable challenge to Pakistan's peace and security. The group's activities intensified in 2023, following a period of ceasefire observed in the preceding year of 2022, which spanned at least four months. TTP's resurgence has become a significant source of tension in Pak-Afghan relations, with Pakistan accusing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan of actively supporting the TTP.

The table below, delineating 'official' claims by TTP from January to December 2023, illustrates a discernible pattern indicating an escalation in the group's attacks, particularly from May onwards. Notably, this surge in activities coincided with the visit of Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to Pakistan, during which assurances were conveyed that the Taliban would prevent any group from utilizing its soil for activities against other countries. It may be noted that militant groups normally exaggerate their claims as the majority of these attacks could not be independently verified and PICSS records only verified incidents.

TTP claimed to have carried out 881 attacks in 2023 killing 993 security forces personnel and injuring 1174 others. The average number of claimed attacks per month in 2023 stands at 72. In the previous year, TTP had claimed to carry out 367 attacks in eight months, with May, June, July, and August 2022 marked by a ceasefire during which no attacks were claimed. The average number of claimed attacks per month in 2022, excluding the ceasefire period, was 46.

TABLE 11: MONTHLY BREAK UP OF TTP'S CLAIM OF ATTACKS IN PAKISTAN

Month	Attacks	Killed	Injured
January	46	49	58
February	29	57	70
March	42	58	72
April	48	70	82
May	77	87	119
June	67	73	83
July	101	94	103
August	146	132	157
September	105	123	169
October	82	97	114
November	78	99	120
December	60	54	27
Total	881	993	1174

It is noteworthy to acknowledge that TTP is prone to making false claims. PICSS was able to verify only approximately 200 claims made by the group. However, despite this limitation, the monthly patterns observed in the claims made by TTP and the data recorded by PICSS exhibit consistent trends.

TTP's Propaganda Activities

TTP has become increasingly adept at utilizing propaganda tools to disseminate its message. At the outset of 2023, the group made key changes in its media apparatus, known as 'Umar Media.' Adhering to an organizational structure similar to the Afghan Taliban, TTP appointed a 'Minister for Information,' Mufti Ghufuran, to oversee all media-related activities, including those of Umar Media.

Umar Media stands as the most active media cell among militant groups in the region. The group maintains a website, 'Umar Media,' which kept changing URL in 2023 due to blocking of its domains by the servers apparently in response to the requests of Pakistani authorities. Umar Media boasts a substantial team responsible for producing videos showcasing TTP's operations, interviews, songs (Nasheeds), and other related content. TTP has also ventured into regular podcasting, featuring key leaders of the group, with audio files uploaded to its website and social media channels such as Telegram. Initially conducted in Pashto, the podcast now includes Urdu content, enabling TTP to reach a broader Pakistani audience. Notably, elements from Al-Qaeda's media cell, Al Sahab, have integrated into TTP's media apparatus, bolstering its outreach.

TTP disseminates a monthly Urdu magazine, 'Mujallah Taliban,' wherein it consistently presents religion-based counter-narratives against the Pakistani state. The magazine routinely criticizes democracy and democratic values, publishing extensive articles designed to shape readers' perceptions. While most content is produced in Pashto and Urdu, the group also maintains Arabic and English sections, albeit with infrequent content updates.

Muhammad Khorasani, a pseudonym, serves as the chief spokesperson. The group has centralized the process of issuing press releases, reserving this responsibility for the spokesperson alone. A controversy erupted in July when TTP's head for the Dera Ismail Khan Wilayat, Commander Asad Afridi, claimed responsibility for an attack on a military garrison in

Zhob, Balochistan. A mysterious group, Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan, also claimed the same incident. TTP's spokesperson, Muhammad Khorasani, denied TTP's involvement and announced that the central Shura had removed Asad Afridi from his position as the shadow governor of the DI Khan Wilayat. Asad Afridi criticized this decision on Twitter and claimed that TJP was a proxy of TTP. He was later reportedly killed under mysterious circumstances in the Lalpura area of Nangarhar province in Afghanistan.

TTP and Al-Qaeda

TTP shares historical ties with Al-Qaeda, with the latter playing a mentorship role while TTP conducted its operations. Much of TTP's literature is rooted in translations of Al-Qaeda's Arabic texts, heavily influenced by Al-Qaeda's Pan-Islamic ideology. Despite aligning itself with the Afghan Taliban and presenting itself as exclusively focused on Pakistan, TTP maintains deep connections with Al-Qaeda. The case of the Jordanian suicide bomber, Dr. Badawi, illustrates this connection. Dr. Badawi, initially arrested by Jordanian intelligence, was connected to TTP's leadership in Pakistan's tribal areas through Al-Qaeda's intermediation. Key Al-Qaeda leaders also found refuge in Pakistan's tribal areas under TTP's protection. These links are deeply embedded in both ideology and operations.

A UN Security Council report in July explicitly highlighted TTP's connections with Al-Qaeda, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, and others. In response, TTP issued a vague rebuttal on July 29, 2023, avoiding any statements that could unequivocally deny its linkage with Al-Qaeda. Instead, TTP asserted that it is not dependent on any organization or country, refraining from naming Al-Qaeda or Afghanistan.

Significantly, Munir Ahmad Jutt, a key commander of Al-Qaeda's South Asian chapter, plays a prominent role in TTP's propaganda campaign. Since his appointment, a noticeable shift has occurred in TTP's propaganda materials. The group now regularly issues statements on key developments in Pakistan, a practice previously rare for TTP.

TTP's Relations with Central Asian Groups

While TTP has historical linkages with Central Asian groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Turkistan Islamic Party, it currently refrains from collaboration with these factions as it seeks to portray itself as a purely Pakistani entity. Consequently, the likelihood of TTP merging or forming alliances with regional or international terrorist groups remains unlikely for the time being.

Support from the Taliban Government in Afghanistan

Despite verbal assurances from the Taliban, support for TTP appears to be on the rise rather than waning. TTP claims to have developed a short-range missile named 'Al-Farooq,' which it deployed in an attack in DI Khan district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on September 5, 2023. Earlier, on June 22, 2023, TTP announced an attack with the Al-Farooq missile on security forces in Bajaur tribal district. It is important to note that the Al-Farooq missile was originally developed by the Afghan Taliban during their resistance against the United States and is now being supplied to TTP.

TTP's operational capabilities have witnessed significant growth over the past two years due to consistent support from the Taliban. While Taliban's supreme leader, Mullah

Haibatullah, may not overtly endorse TTP's anti-Pakistan activities, ideologically aligned with Al-Qaeda, Taliban leaders actively protect TTP.

Despite Mullah Haibatullah's decree that prohibits individuals from leaving Afghanistan for jihad, Afghans continue to join TTP, fighting alongside the group. Fundraising efforts under the banner of 'Jihad-e-Pakistan' persist. To bolster the impression of the Taliban's ideological support for TTP, the group published an article about Taliban ideologue Rahimullah Haqqani, who was killed by DAESH in 2022. The article claimed that Rahimullah Haqqani offered his services to TTP after the fall of Kabul, emphasizing that 'Jihad' in Afghanistan had concluded, and 'Jihad Pakistan' had become his primary focus. TTP leadership purportedly declined his offer while stating that he continued to provide the required ideological guidance to the TTP. This attempt by TTP aims to remind top Taliban clerics of Rahimullah Haqqani's support. Given TTP's foundation in religious ideology, it consistently seeks religious justifications for its actions. Some in Afghanistan support the group for religious reasons, while others view it as a strategic asset for bargaining against Pakistan.

TTP & DAESH

It has been observed that the TTP deliberately avoid direct criticism of DAESH. For the preparation of this report, we analysed some key statements of TTP where it could criticise DAESH but it did not utter a single word. The official statement of TTP condemning a suicide attack in July 2023 against the JUI-F congregation in the Bajaur tribal district did not mention DAESH at all. Three of its key leaders released a video statement condemning the attack but even that video statement was also without naming DAESH. In a podcast in August 2023, TTP's 'Minister for Information' spoke extensively against the Bajaur suicide bombing but put all the blame on Pakistani security forces and did not utter a single word against DAESH.

It seems that there is some level of behind the scene understanding between the two groups. As per PICSS sources, DAESH has been providing support to TTP for its build-up at Pak Afghan border.

Pakistan's Approach to TTP

Pakistan has adopted a stringent stance in addressing the TTP threat. Army Chief General Asim Munir has categorically refused negotiations with TTP, emphasizing intelligence-based operations as the primary focus of Pakistani security and intelligence forces. Early in the year, discussions centred on a major operation in the tribal districts, but public protests against such an operation throughout KP province led the government to opt for intelligence-based operations.

Within Pakistan's decision-making circles, opinions vary on whether Pakistan should conduct aerial strikes against TTP positions inside Afghanistan. While some believe such strikes may yield tactical advantages, others argue that they could have negative strategic consequences, potentially alienating pro-Pakistan factions, including the Haqqanis.

While publicly opposing talks with TTP, some journalists claimed that secret talks are going on between Pakistan and TTP through a third country. In December 2023, a leading religious politician Moulana Fazlur Rahman received an invitation from the Taliban government to visit Afghanistan. Observers believe that his visit is also part of the efforts to resolve the issue of TTP through talks with Afghan Taliban leadership.

Mysterious Killings of TTP Commanders in Afghanistan

The pattern of mysterious killings of TTP commanders in Afghanistan persisted throughout 2023. In 2022, key commanders were killed, and this trend continued into the year 2023. Notably, TTP's shadow governor for the DI Khan Wilayat was killed in mid-August, while another TTP commander heading the Karachi chapter was killed in July. Unconfirmed reports suggested the poisoning of TTP Zhob's shadow governor, Sarbakaf Momand, in June in Afghanistan. TTP denied these reports, but since then, no statements have been attributed to the typically active Sarbkaf. In March 2023, an improvised explosive device (IED) blast in Khost, Afghanistan, claimed the lives of six TTP commanders, including Tofan Sherian Madakhel and Fazal Amin. TTP commander Tariq Rafiq, also known as Button Kharab and responsible for the Dasu dam suicide attack against Chinese engineers in July 2021, was killed in mid-July in Paich Darra, Kunar province. He had also collaborated with the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) in the attack against Chinese teachers at Karachi's Confucius Center in 2022. On July 12, another TTP commander, Zazar Uttal, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Zabul province. In late August 2023, TTP commander Jamal-ud-Din was killed in Maidan province. On August 23, 2023, another TTP commander, Jawat Wazir, fell victim to unknown gunmen in Khost province.

On August 14, a mysterious explosion occurred in Khost city, resulting in the deaths of several commanders and fighters from another militant group, Hafiz Gul Bahadur group. Initially, reports suggested that Pakistan had conducted an aerial strike, but the Afghan government later clarified that it was not an aerial strike. The exact nature of the explosion remains unknown, but it resulted in the demise of anti-Pakistan militants. On July 20, another TTP commander, Safdar, was shot by unknown gunmen in Nangarhar province, leaving him critically injured.

The killings of numerous TTP commanders on Afghan soil challenge the Taliban government's claims that TTP does not operate from Afghanistan.

Internal Rifts, Defections and Proxies in TTP

Despite the joining of some more groups into TTP in 2023, the fissures were visible too as loyalists of late Umar Khalid Khorasani (founder of Jamat-ul-Ahrar) were not satisfied with the policies of Mufti Noor Wali. Some high-profile attacks were claimed by TTP Wilayats but the central spokesman denied the group's involvement. The most important one was the Peshawar Police Line attack which was claimed by the so-called governor of Zhob Wilayat Sarbakaf Mohmand but TTP's official spokesman distanced the group from the attack. Sarbakaf Mohmand was later side lined by the TTP. He was a close associate of late Umar Khalid Khorasani (Abdul Wali). Another important instance was a claim made by TTP DI Khan Wilayat's so-called governor Asad Afridi of the attacks against the military garrison in Zhob city of Balochistan in July 2023. The attack was later claimed by Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP) and it also released a public statement in which it protested against Asad Afridi. TTP then announced the removal of Asad Afridi from his post. However, Asad Afridi reacted against the central leadership and claimed that the name TJP was being used as a proxy. After a few weeks, he was reportedly killed in Afghanistan mysteriously although his death could not be confirmed independently.

In February 2023 a new group emerged with the name Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP). It announced that Abdullah Yaghistani is the head of the organization. TJP then claimed most

of the high-profile attacks in Pakistan including the deadliest attack against the Pakistan Army in DI Khan in December 2023 in which more than 23 soldiers died. Our observation is that the TJP is a parallel setup erected by the TTP to carry on its armed activities in the wake of any ceasefire or peace talks. In 2022, TTP supported a former rival organization known as Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group (Shura Mujahideen North Waziristan). Since HBG group remained a rival to TTP since the inception of TTP, it could be a reliable partner for a long time. Thus, TTP created a proper proxy of its own.

TJP platform is also being used to reach out to Baloch militant groups to create a broader alliance against Pakistani security forces. When TTP claims responsibility for any attack, Pakistan puts pressure on the Afghan Taliban. The creation of TJP would also serve the purpose of warding away pressure on the Taliban government. However, Pakistan remained more critical towards the Taliban government after every claim made by the TJP. Since most of the TJP claimed attacks involvement of Afghan citizens some in Pakistan consider it a joint proxy of the Taliban's secret service and TTP.

A small group of TTP from South Waziristan defected to the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group. TTP commander Mukhlis Mehsud who was a close associate of TTP's late commander Shehryar Mehsud defected in July 2023 to join Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group's 'Shura Mujahideen'. Mukhlis was appointed as head of 'Halqa Mehsud' (a section which deals with fighters from the Mehsud tribe). He is the first Mehsud commander who joined the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group. He joined TTP in 2020 at a time when many smaller groups had merged back into the group. It is yet to be seen if this starts a new phase of defection/fragmentation of TTP. However, the emergence of Ansar ul Jihad another militant group in December 2023 suggests that the idea of bringing all the groups under the banner of TTP was having some complications therefore there might be a need to have some 'independent' groups.

Future Outlook of TTP

As we move forward, several critical factors will shape the future outlook of the situation. The TTP's enhanced operational capabilities, growing propaganda machinery, and enduring ties with Al-Qaeda warrant vigilance from both Pakistan and the international community. The Afghan Taliban's complex stance on TTP and the ongoing regional dynamics will continue to influence the group's activities.

Moreover, Pakistan's approach to tackling the TTP threat and its evolving relations with the United States will be pivotal. The prospect of reconciliation efforts and potential changes in leadership within TTP could also alter the group's direction.

In conclusion, while the TTP's activities have surged in 2023, the situation remains fluid, and multiple variables will determine the future course of events. Vigilance, cooperation, and diplomacy will be essential in addressing the challenges posed by TTP and ensuring regional stability.

Islamic State and its Activities in Pakistan

In 2023, Pakistan experienced a consistent surge in militant activities carried out by the Islamic State (ISIS). Notably, two branches of ISIS operated within the country—namely, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), primarily active in the North West with a focus on Afghanistan and parts of

Pakistan, and the Islamic State Pakistan Province (ISPP), primarily operating in the South West with a mandate for activities within Pakistan.

Throughout the year, the Islamic State executed a total of 41 attacks in Pakistan, with 28 attributed to ISKP and 13 to ISPP. The toll from these attacks was devastating, resulting in the loss of 105 lives, including 27 security personnel, 78 civilians, and two militants from a rival group. Additionally, 129 individuals were injured, comprising 20 security personnel and 109 civilians. The predominant tactics employed in these attacks were target killings and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), accounting for 25 target killings and 11 IED attacks. The year also witnessed two ambushes and one grenade attack. However, the most notorious incident was the Bajaur suicide attack, claiming the lives of over sixty civilians and injuring over a hundred more, underscoring the impactful reach of the Islamic State in the region.

IS on Narrative Front

While ISPP struggled in the realm of propaganda materials, encompassing written, audio, and video content, ISKP exhibited a significant surge, emulating the sophisticated propaganda machinery style reminiscent of ISIS Central during its dominance in Syria and Iraq. Unlike other Wilayahs (ISIS provinces) combined, ISKP surpassed them all by publishing a total of 101 propaganda materials.

ISKP adopted a systematic approach, targeting audiences based on the political dynamics of their linguistic geographical locations. Publications were issued in Urdu, Arabic, Persian, and English languages. In a year, they released 30 magazines, comprising 12 issues of their English-language magazine, "Voice of Khurasan" (from Issue 20 to 31), 12 issues of the Pashto language magazine, "Ghog Khurasan" (Issue 16 to 27), and the initiation of their Arabic language magazine, "Saut-al-Khurasan," with eight issues.

In addition, ISKP disseminated two audio messages and released 26 videos, predominantly in Pashto. Although their primary focus was on the Taliban regime, they also directed attention towards Pakistan in these releases. The group delved into book publications, producing six books, with the most notable being a magnum opus by the group's leader, Dr. Shahab al-Muhajir. This significant work addresses various aspects of an ideal Islamic government, covering politics, diplomacy, warfare, economy, and education, contrasting with the perspective of the Taliban. Other books centred on critiquing the Taliban and the practices of Deobandi.

Furthermore, ISKP issued over 30 booklets and pamphlets, lacking a specific series or format, wherein both Pakistan and Afghanistan were criticized and threatened in various ways.

Pakistan-Focused Propaganda Material and Threats

ISKP has released a total of nine propaganda materials specifically targeting the state of Pakistan. These include five videos, one of which is a Nasheed, two books, one booklet, and one pamphlet. Noteworthy in these video publications is the evident improvement in video quality, message delivery tactics, and overall maturity in their propaganda approach.

Each video ranges from 20 minutes to one hour, with one being published in English and the rest in Pashto. The English language video, titled "The Unrestrained Metastasis within the body of the Islamic Nation," provides a comprehensive explanation of Pakistan's ongoing

financial situation, its implications, the historical context leading to this point, and proposed solutions. This video exhibits a level of maturity in content akin to earlier documentaries produced by ISIS during its rule in Syria and Iraq. It presents its message through an academic lens, surpassing content created by other militant organizations, aiming to establish a psychological perception of the educated individuals within ISKP.

The second video, titled "O tribal lions," published in Pashto, pays tribute to the men of the ex-FATA region for their bravery, steadfastness, and sacrifices during the twenty-year-long War on Terror. It conveys a message of sympathy for the perceived war crimes committed against them by the state of Pakistan and emphasizes their betrayal despite voluntary service for Pakistan, with implications reaching back to the 1948 Kashmir war. The video includes footage of drone attacks, and leaked videos depicting their treatment behind bars, and criticizes the Pakistani leadership for allegedly disregarding their pain despite being democratically elected. The video seems to serve as an attempt to recruit tribal men into the ranks of ISKP.

The third video from ISKP focuses on highlighting Pak-Afghan relations, cautioning the audience not to be deceived by ongoing political disputes and suggesting that Pakistan and Afghanistan are two faces of the same coin. The video accuses the Taliban of being representatives of Pakistan in Afghanistan, presenting evidence of videos where Taliban leadership praises Pakistan for its contributions to the fight against Americans. It also alleges collaboration between the Taliban and Pakistan, Pakistan's attempts for the Taliban regime's international recognition, and the presence of alleged ISI members within the Taliban leadership, including figures like Mullah Haibatullah and Siraj-ud-Din Haqqani.

The Pashto video Nasheed, released earlier in the year, is a compilation of clips from various times in ISIS' history when spies were allegedly caught and assassinated. The most disturbing parts include assassination clips of alleged Pakistani spies and members of the armed forces, some killed in beheading styles and public slaughters with normal civilians as witnesses. The exact dates of these incidents cannot be independently verified, raising questions about ISKP/ISPP's audacity to carry out such actions in public places in Pakistan.

The last video on the list is specifically dedicated to Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman and his party JUI-F, titled "The Republican Apostates." This video indicates ISKP's discontent against the JUI-F. The consistent targeting of JUI-F in ISKP's propaganda materials, including this video, might not be surprising considering the earlier gruesome Bajaur suicide attack. The video discusses alleged double politics played by Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, participating in the democratic process and raising questions about his roles during the 20 years of the War on Terror.

ISKP has authored two books related to Pakistan, and one specifically targets JUI-F titled "Comprehensive Information about the Loyal Children of the Republic and Advocates of Democracy in the Name of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam." This book delves into the brief history of JUI-F, highlighting what ISKP perceives as the alleged double politics played by Fazl-ur-Rehman in Pakistani politics. It also addresses his perceived "betrayal" to the "Mujahideen of Afghanistan" during the 20-year war, examining his relations with Ahmad Shah Massoud at a time when Mullah Omar was vying for power.

The second book, spanning over 400 pages, is titled "Clear Reasons for Disbelief of the Pakistani Government." Beginning with the era of the East India Company, it chronicles events

leading to the creation of Pakistan, delving into the armed forces, including the ISI, and positing that their founders were Britishers. The book critiques the "un-Islamic" principles of the Pakistani constitution, comparing it to Islamic teachings through the lens of the Quran and Hadith, along with commentaries from historical Islamic scholars. It also discusses conditions under which Takfir can be applied to a Muslim, implying that the Pakistani government fulfils these conditions. Finally, the book advocates for the lawfulness of conducting "Jihad" within Pakistan and Afghanistan according to Shariah.

ISKP's booklet focuses on elections, explaining how democracy is considered un-Islamic with references from the Quran and Hadith. It criticizes the Pakistani government for adopting democratic principles. The timing of this booklet's release suggests ISKP's discontent with the upcoming elections in Pakistan in February 2024, underscored by their deadly suicide attack in Bajaur.

Additionally, a pamphlet released mid-year by ISKP encourages TTP to part ways with the Afghan Taliban and join ISKP instead. Despite no indications that such a move was welcomed by TTP, the neutrality displayed by both organizations against each other throughout the year raises questions about potential future developments.

Conclusion and Future Projections

In examining the extensive array of propaganda materials released by ISKP in 2023, it becomes evident that the group has strategically intensified its efforts to shape narratives, particularly targeting Pakistan, its political figures, and the democratic process. The focus on JUI-F, Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, and the critique of democratic principles in Pakistan underscores a deliberate effort to destabilize the political landscape. The sophistication in their propaganda machinery, coupled with audacious acts like the Bajaur suicide attack, reflects an evolving strategy that aims to not only assert ideological influence but also disrupt the political and security apparatus in the region.

The detailed analysis of their publications against Pakistan, the Taliban, and JUI-F highlights the group's multi-faceted approach, employing videos, books, booklets, and pamphlets to disseminate their narrative. The strategic targeting of JUI-F and the explicit critique of democratic processes indicate a potential intention to disrupt the upcoming elections in Pakistan in 2024.

ISKP's emphasis on propaganda sophistication, diverse linguistic outreach, and attempts to influence public sentiment through detailed narratives signal an organization with ambitions beyond mere militancy. The year 2023 has seen an expansion of their ideological front, creating a nuanced narrative that appeals to a broad spectrum of audiences.

Looking ahead to 2024, the group's trajectory suggests a continuation of its efforts to undermine the stability of Pakistan, particularly through the exploitation of existing political fault-lines. The discontent expressed towards the electoral process implies a potential escalation of attacks or disruptions during the upcoming elections. Moreover, their attempts to sway TTP towards their cause, despite no clear indicators of success, underscores a proactive stance, hinting at potential shifts in alliances or strategic collaborations.

In short, ISKP's multifaceted propaganda campaign in 2023, marked by ideological narratives and strategic targeting, positions the group for continued influence and potential disruptive actions in 2024. The group's evolving sophistication suggests a dynamic approach that extends beyond conventional militancy, making it crucial for security forces and policymakers to anticipate and counteract their multifaceted strategies.

Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, militants associated with the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group posed a formidable challenge to Pakistani security forces throughout 2023. The group maintained a notable presence in the southern regions of KP, encompassing areas such as Bannu, Lakki Marwat, North and South Waziristan, as well as adjacent localities. Observations indicated that the group has been undergoing an evolutionary process.

The Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group comprises at least four to five sub-factions that operate relatively independently. These factions include the Mufti Sadiq Noor faction, Siddiquillah faction, Jaishul Mahdi, Khalil faction, and several smaller factions. The estimated total fighting force of the group ranges from 2500 to 3000 hardened fighters, primarily hailing from North Waziristan and South Waziristan. Additionally, the group recruits militants from various areas, including Afghan Taliban fighters.

Notably, the group's propaganda material is predominantly disseminated through Al-Mansur Media, and it has formally adopted the name Ansar Al Mahdi Khorasan (Helpers of Imam Mahdi from the Khorasan region). The quality of its videos has exhibited a gradual improvement, with fighters now appearing in formal military attire, a departure from the group's previous practices. In a significant development in 2023, a major Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commander, Mukhlis Yar Mehsud, joined the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, further strengthening its position. The group's fighters are operational on both sides of the border.

Historically, the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group entered into a peace deal with Pakistani security forces from 2006 to 2014. Following the military operation Zarb-e-Azb, the group announced its intention to combat Pakistani forces but refrained from launching attacks until 2022. Subsequently, it took up arms against Pakistan, emerging as a more disruptive force than the TTP in certain areas. It is evident that the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group boasts the largest manpower after the TTP, and establishing peace in the region necessitates addressing this group's activities.

Overview of Militant Groups Operating in Balochistan

Despite a notable 65 per cent increase in militant attacks in Balochistan during 2023, certain developments unfolded that are expected to have a far-reaching impact on the situation. One of the most significant occurrences was the disclosure of the arrest of Gulzar Imam, the founder and head of the Baloch National Army (BNA). Previously leading his faction of the Baloch Republican Army, Imam had formed BNA in January 2022 by aligning with Sarfaraz Bangulzai of the United Baloch Army.

Imam's arrest and subsequent public denouncement of violence paved the way for the surrender of several other commanders. In mid-December, Sarfaraz Bangulzai, Imam's successor and close aide, along with 70 key commanders and family members, renounced violence and laid down their weapons. This marked another blow to militancy in the province, as BNA, the third most effective militant organization after BLA and BLF, practically ceased to exist following top-level surrenders and arrests.

BNA had joined the Baloch Raaji Aajoi Sangar (BRAS) alliance in 2022, but after Imam's arrest, the group accused both the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) of playing a negative role in weakening BNA. Consequently, Sarfaraz Bangulzai announced the group's departure from BRAS months before his surrender, rendering BRAS non-functional. Although BLA, BLF,

and Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA) remain part of the alliance on paper, no attacks were claimed by BRAS in 2023, and no statements were issued.

Efforts to revive BRAS appear to be underway, led by BLF head Dr Allah Nazar, who has publicly advocated for unity under BRAS. In November 2023, he urged all militant groups to unite under the banner of BRAS, indicating potential developments in this regard in 2024.

Following Imam's arrest and Sarfaraz's surrender, both BLA and BLF competed to recruit remaining fighters from BNA. Despite these challenges, militancy in Balochistan continued to pose a serious security threat to Pakistan in 2023.

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) established a new Wilayat in ethnic Baloch areas in 2023, covering Makran and Qalat divisions in June 2023. Leveraging its support base in southern Afghanistan, TTP extended assistance to Baloch militants operating from Afghanistan. In 2022, two Baloch groups joined TTP, strengthening its support from ethnic Baloch areas. Despite ideological differences, TTP and Baloch militant groups found common ground in their opposition to Pakistan's state, leading to an unannounced alliance and cooperation. Pakistani authorities suspect the hand of Indian intelligence RAW behind the militancy, orchestrating these groups and playing a pivotal role in their convergence.

The year 2024 is anticipated to witness more surrenders and the mainstreaming of Baloch militants. Simultaneously, violence may escalate further if a peace deal between TTP and Pakistan is not reached. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) has indicated its intention to recruit more female fighters, with Bashir Zeb Baloch defending the active participation of women in fighting in a video message released in July 2023. The glorification of the role of female fighters in conflicts, exemplified by a BLA female suicide bomber's attack in 2022, has attracted additional female supporters to join the militancy.

Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army

In 2023, the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA), a militant group active in Sindh, carried out approximately fifteen attacks. These incidents predominantly targeted civilians in interior Sindh and Karachi, whom the SRA believed to be associated with intelligence and security agencies. Notably, this marked a decrease in the number of attacks compared to the previous year, 2022.

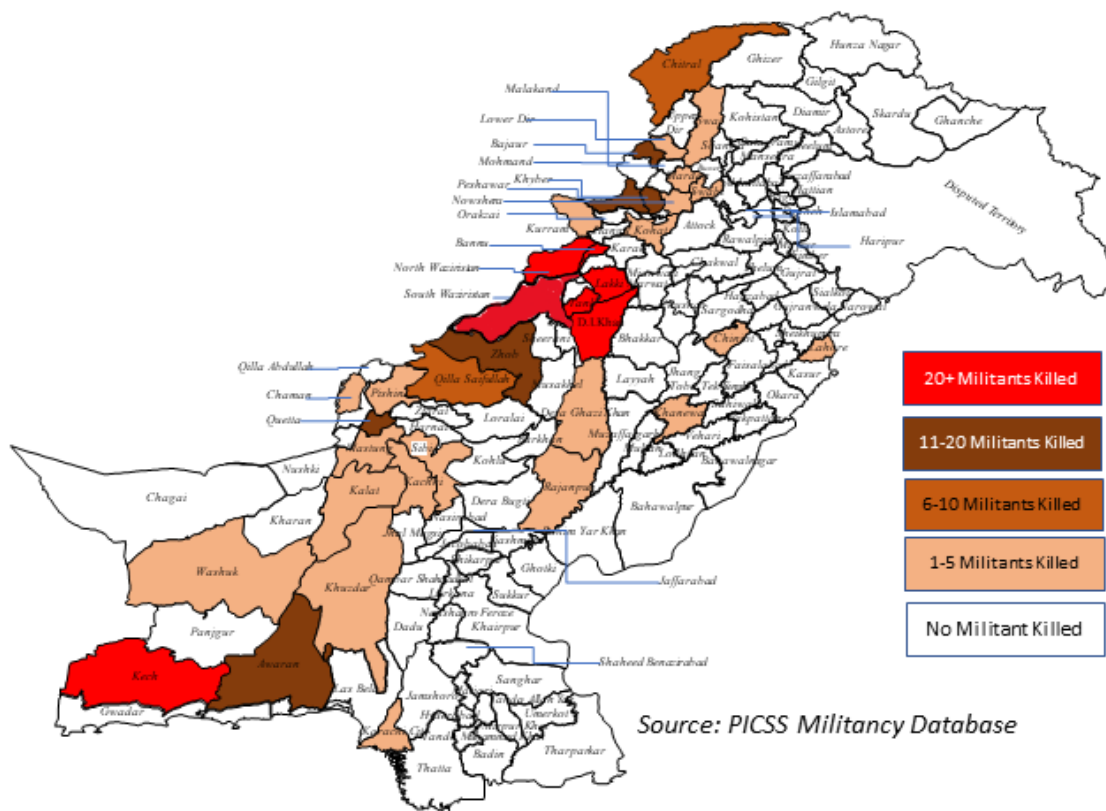
Out of the fifteen attacks, five were attributed to militants in Karachi, three were reported in Jamshoro, and one each in Mirpur-Khas, Nawab-Shah, Khairpur, Thatta, Hyderabad, and Qambar-Shahdadkot. Among these attacks, only two were directed towards the police, both occurring in Karachi. One involved an improvised explosive device (IED) on a motorcycle, and the other was a grenade attack, resulting in the death of two police officers and injuries to three others.

The SRA's targets included civilians, primarily from the Punjab province, who were either conducting businesses or working for various NGOs. Notably, two attacks were carried out on former members of religious organizations, with Khalid Raza, a former member of Al-Badar and the director of the Dar Arqam School system, being targeted in Karachi. The second attack targeted Sardar Hussain Arrain in Nawab-Shah, a political activist associated with Allah o Akbar Tahreek, a political wing of Jamaat-ul-Dawa. The SRA accused both individuals of working for intelligence organizations and spying on Sindhi nationalists. Two attacks on government property were reported in Jamshoro district, including the destruction of a 500 KV transmission line leading to Punjab and the sabotage of a railway track heading towards Punjab.

The majority of the SRA's attacks focused on civilians, particularly those of Punjabi ethnicity living in Sindh. The group's statements consistently express opposition to all outsiders, especially Punjabis, and underscore their commitment to targeting them until Sindh is perceived as free from what they consider an occupation. The SRA accuses Punjab of exploiting Sindh's resources and income, making the Punjabi ethnic population the primary targets of their attacks in 2023.

Nationwide Security Forces Actions in 2023

The escalation in militant attacks in 2023 was concomitant with a notable increase in the frequency and intensity of security forces' actions. Throughout the year, security forces executed 371 noteworthy operations, resulting in the neutralization of 479 militants, injuries to 71 others, and the apprehension of 640 suspected militants. This figure incorporates 71 militants affiliated with the Balochistan National Army (BNA) who voluntarily surrendered to authorities in Balochistan. Tragically, 70 security forces personnel lost their lives in these operations, with an additional 16 sustaining injuries. By comparison, 209 security forces' actions were recorded in 2022, resulting in the demise of 323 suspected militants and the arrest of 280 individuals. In 2021, the country reported 207 notable actions, leading to the death of 188 suspected militants and the apprehension of 222 others.



Geographically, security forces effectively neutralized 186 militants in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), 177 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), 104 in Balochistan, 10 in Punjab, and two in Sindh. The province of Punjab, in particular, witnessed the arrest of 330 suspected militants, encompassing members of various militant groups such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashker-e-Jhangvi, Daesh, Sepah-i-Muhammad, and Al-Qaeda. This significant number of arrests in Punjab underscores the persistent efforts of these militant groups to instigate disturbances in the

province and other urban centers. Additionally, 119 suspected militants were apprehended in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including individuals wanted in connection with various terrorism cases.

TABLE 12: REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SECURITY FORCES ACTIONS IN 2023

Region	Nos	Killed					Injured					Arst
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	
KPK	119	13	0	177	1	191	4	0	21	1	26	119
FATA	94	45	0	186	2	233	10	0	39	0	49	52
Punjab	74	0	0	10	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	330
Balochistan	48	12	0	104	1	117	2	0	11	0	13	82
Sindh	33	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	49
ICT	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
GB	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Total	371	70	0	479	4	553	16	0	71	1	88	640

Shift in Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Strategy

Pakistan has undergone a discernible shift in its approach towards militant groups, notably adopting a hardened stance and opting for a forceful response. This strategic decision, articulated during a National Security Committee meeting held on April 7 in Islamabad, reflects a departure from the previous administration's policy of engaging in dialogue with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and permitting the return of some TTP militants to the country. The civil and military leadership criticized this earlier policy, leading to a decisive resolution to conduct country-wide operations against various militant factions.

Although plans for large-scale operations in North and South Waziristan, as well as certain areas in the Khyber tribal district, were contemplated, protests from local residents and unfavorable public opinion deterred their execution. Similarly, limited-scale operations in southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Bajaur, Mohmand tribal districts, and parts of the Malakand division were also abandoned due to negative public sentiment.

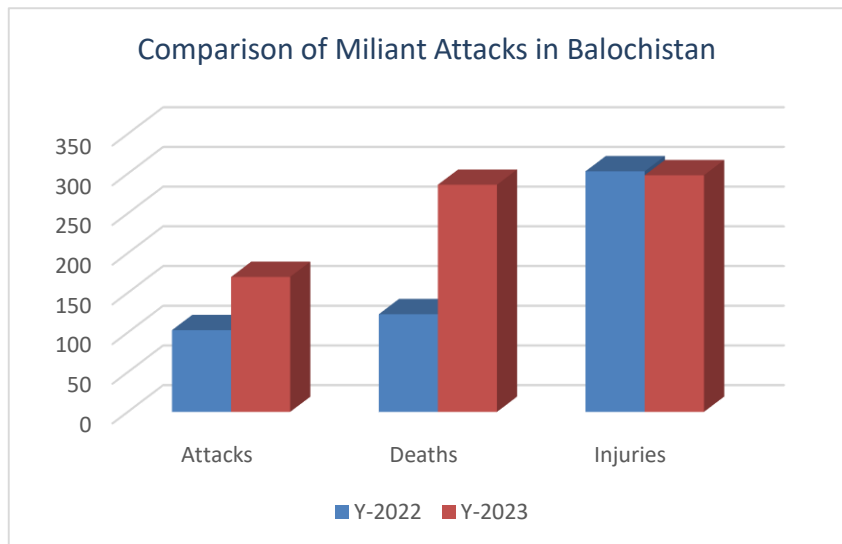
The government has now communicated an ultimatum to the TTP and other militant groups, calling for unconditional surrender or imminent confrontation. This shift in strategy has strained relations with the interim government of the Afghan Taliban, as Pakistan sought an effective response to its requests for action against anti-Pakistan militant groups operating from Afghanistan. Furthermore, Pakistan has intensified its stance on international engagement with the Afghan Taliban, making it contingent upon verifiable actions against militant groups operating from Afghan soil. The issue of access to modern weapons for these groups has also been formally raised at the United Nations.

Despite the apparent stance of refraining from direct talks with the TTP, unconfirmed reports surfaced towards the year's end suggesting secret negotiations between the TTP and Pakistan through a third country. The invitation extended to Moulana Fazlur Rehman, a prominent religious politician and head of Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam, to visit Afghanistan is seen as part of broader efforts to resolve the TTP issue through negotiations. In the initial week of January 2024, a delegation led by Mullah Muhammad Shirin Akhund, the Deputy of Strategic Intelligence of the Ministry of Defense and Governor of Kandahar, engaged in talks with Pakistani officials, including interim Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani. The potential for a negotiated settlement of the issue is acknowledged, highlighting evolving dynamics in the region.

PROVINCIAL SECURITY PROFILE

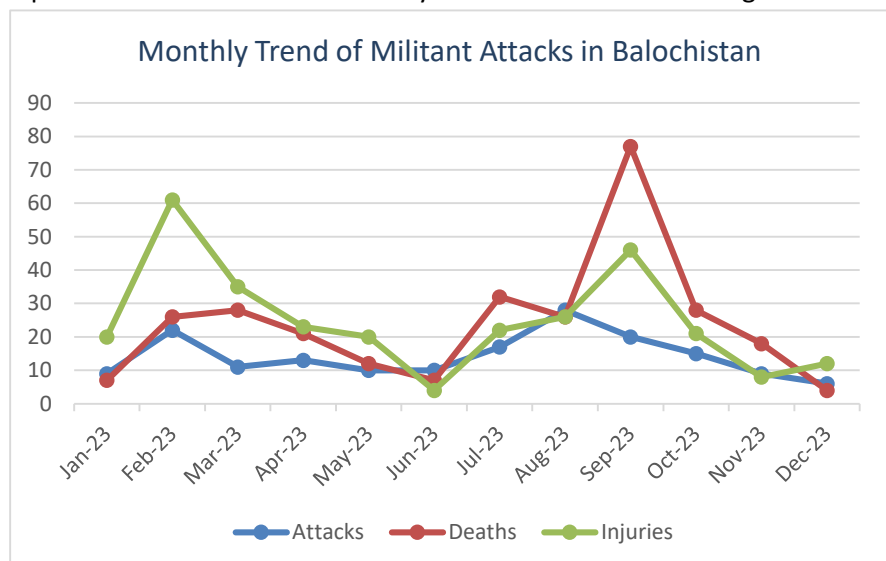
Security Situation in Balochistan

The security situation in Balochistan exhibited a concerning deterioration in 2023, marked by a notable surge in militant attacks. The province witnessed 170 such incidents, resulting in the tragic loss of 286 lives and injuries to 298 individuals. Comparatively, in 2022, Balochistan experienced 103 militant attacks, leading to 123 fatalities and 303 injuries. In 2021, there were 114 militant attacks in the province, resulting in 177 deaths and 346 injuries. When juxtaposed with 2022 figures, there has been a 65 percent increase in militant attacks in 2023, accompanied by a significant 133 percent rise in fatalities, while the number of injuries registered a marginal two percent decrease.



Of the 286 individuals killed in these 170 attacks, 151 were civilians, 114 were security forces personnel, and 21 were militants engaging in the attacks. Among the 298 individuals injured, 195 were civilians, 99 were security forces personnel, and four were militants. Notably, 15 individuals were kidnapped by the militants. This grim scenario underscores the disproportionate impact on civilians, who bore the brunt of the violence, while militants continued to target security forces in the region. The evolving security landscape in Balochistan demands urgent attention and comprehensive measures to address the escalating challenges.

The security landscape in Balochistan witnessed dynamic fluctuations throughout 2023, marked by a surge in militant attacks during February, accompanied by an increase in fatalities and injuries. Subsequently, there was a decline in these figures, although the death and injury ratio remained high. This trend persisted until June when militant attacks experienced a resurgence, reaching a peak in July—the most violent month of the year. August marked the onset of a consistent reduction in militant attacks in the province.



July, in particular, stood out as the most tumultuous month, witnessing a significant number of casualties, including those resulting from the tragic Mastung suicide attack. Overall, Balochistan encountered 56 guerilla attacks, accounting for the majority of deaths, while 38 attacks involving Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) caused the majority of injuries. In comparison to the two suicide attacks recorded in 2022, the province experienced an increase with five suicide attacks in 2023. Additionally, the province recorded 37 incidents of targeted killings and seven incidents of kidnapping, leading to the abduction of 15 individuals, with five of them losing their lives. Furthermore, Balochistan witnessed 24 grenade attacks and three rocket attacks.

This intricate pattern of militant activities underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by Balochistan's security apparatus, necessitating a comprehensive and adaptive response to ensure the well-being of the populace and stability in the region.

TABLE 13: TYPE OF ATTACKS IN BALOCHISTAN IN 2023

Type	Nos	Killed					Injured					Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
MA	56	73	0	15	30	118	46	0	4	22	72	0	0
IED	38	10	0	1	33	44	29	0	0	90	119	0	0
TK	37	20	0	0	28	48	0	0	0	10	10	0	0
GrA	24	0	0	0	3	3	8	0	0	28	36	0	0
K	7	0	0	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
SA	5	11	0	4	52	67	15	0	0	37	52	0	0
RA	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	8	9	0	0
Total	170	114	0	20	151	285	99	0	4	195	298	0	15

The provincial capital of Quetta continued to be a primary target for militant activities in 2023, with a recorded 35 attacks, constituting over 20 percent of the total incidents in the province. These attacks resulted in 29 fatalities, including 13 security forces personnel, 10 civilians, and six attacking militants. Additionally, 64 individuals sustained injuries, comprising 49 civilians, 14 security forces personnel, and one militant. The spectrum of attacks in Quetta included a TTP-claimed suicide attack on police lines, 10 instances of targeted killings, 10 grenade attacks, eight guerrilla attacks, four IED-based attacks, one rocket attack, and one incident of kidnapping. Various militant groups, including TTP, BLA, BLF, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Daesh, were observed carrying out attacks in the capital.

Subsequently, the southwestern district of Kech emerged as another area of concern, witnessing 19 attacks resulting in the deaths of 48 individuals, including 31 civilians and 16 security forces personnel. Baloch militant groups were prominently active in this district. Notably, a suicide attack claimed by BLA targeted an FC convoy in Turbat, marking the second instance of a Baloch woman, Sumaiya Qalandari of BLA's Majeed Brigade, carrying out such an attack. The first instance occurred when Shari Baloch targeted a van carrying Chinese teachers at Karachi University in April 2022.

Mastung district saw 14 attacks, leading to 48 fatalities, including 31 civilians and 16 security forces personnel. ISPP/Daesh exhibited notable activity in this district, claiming multiple attacks, including targeting a convoy of JUI-F central leader Hafiz Hamdullah. Daesh is also suspected of conducting a suicide attack during the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birth anniversary, resulting in 54 deaths and 25 injuries. Daesh further targeted security forces, policemen escorting polio teams, and religious scholars in Mastung.

In Gwadar, a total of six militant attacks occurred, with one prominent incident claimed by the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) targeting two security forces convoys, resulting in the tragic loss of 14

personnel. Another significant attack in the district was claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), targeting a security forces convoy escorting Chinese workers. Out of the six militant attacks in Gwadar, four were attributed to the Baloch Liberation Front, underscoring the group's substantial presence in the port city.

Troubles were also observed in Zhob district, where an unclaimed suicide attack was reported. The incident targeted Jamat Islami chief Siraj ul Haq. Additionally, a notable guerrilla attack, claimed by Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan, targeted a military camp in Zhob cantonment.

Furthermore, an FC camp in Kachhi (formerly Bolan district) faced a suicide attack, with separate claims by Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan and the Islamic State Pakistan Province (ISPP) indicating a dual responsibility for the assault. The multifaceted nature of these attacks underscores the complex security challenges faced by various districts in Balochistan, demanding a nuanced and comprehensive approach to mitigate such threats.

TABLE 14: AFFECTED DISTRICTS IN BALOCHISTAN IN 2023

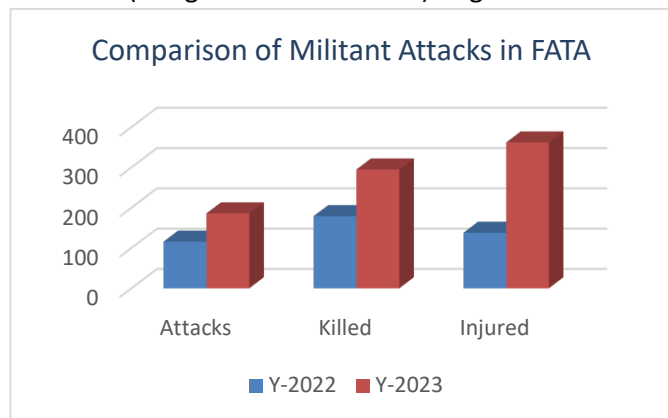
District	Nos	Killed					Injured					M Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
Quetta	35	13	0	6	10	29	14	0	1	49	64	0	1
Kech	19	16	0	1	31	48	4	0	0	8	12	0	3
Mastung	14	7	0	1	56	64	2	0	0	40	42	0	0
Khuzdar	13	5	0	0	7	12	3	0	0	20	23	0	0
Dera Bugti	8	4	0	2	5	11	3	0	0	1	4	0	6
Kalat	8	3	0	0	3	6	5	0	0	5	10	0	5
Chaman	7	4	0	1	4	9	2	0	0	0	2	0	0
Gwadar	6	18	0	2	0	20	20	0	2	3	25	0	0
Sibi	6	1	0	0	3	4	0	0	0	7	7	0	0
Bolan	5	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	15	17	0	0
Harnai	5	0	0	0	8	8	0	0	0	12	12	0	0
Kachhi	5	12	0	2	3	17	14	0	0	1	15	0	0
Zhob	5	13	0	4	8	25	0	0	0	13	13	0	0
Panjgur	4	4	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Naseerabad	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Noshki	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0
Qilla Abdullah	3	1	0	0	2	3	5	0	0	0	5	0	0
Shirani	3	4	0	1	0	5	0	0	1	1	2	0	0
Barkhan	2	0	0	0	6	6	0	0	0	16	16	0	0
Kharan	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0
Kohlu	2	3	0	0	0	3	9	0	0	0	9	0	0
Pishin	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
Sohbatpur	2	1	0	0	1	2	4	0	0	1	5	0	0
Washuk	2	1	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Awaran	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chagai	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0
Hub	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Qilla Saifullah	1	2	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	3	0	0
Surab	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ziarat	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	170	114	0	21	151	286	99	0	4	195	298	0	15

Security forces in Balochistan achieved significant success in countering militant activities during the reported period. A total of 104 suspected militants were neutralized by security forces through targeted operations, emphasizing a robust response to the security challenges in the region. Additionally, 11 individuals suspected of involvement in militant activities were apprehended, demonstrating the authorities' commitment to identifying and apprehending those responsible for unrest.

A noteworthy development in the counterinsurgency efforts was the surrender of 70 militants associated with the Baloch National Army (BNA), including its commander Sarfaraz Bangulzai. This surrender, coupled with the arrest of key BNA founder Gulzar Imam alias Shambay (announced in April, though believed to have occurred in 2022), has significantly impacted BNA activities, leading to a notable cessation. The surrender of 70 militants affiliated with the BNA represents a substantial success for Pakistani intelligence agencies, indicating effective measures in curbing the operational capacity of this militant group in Balochistan.

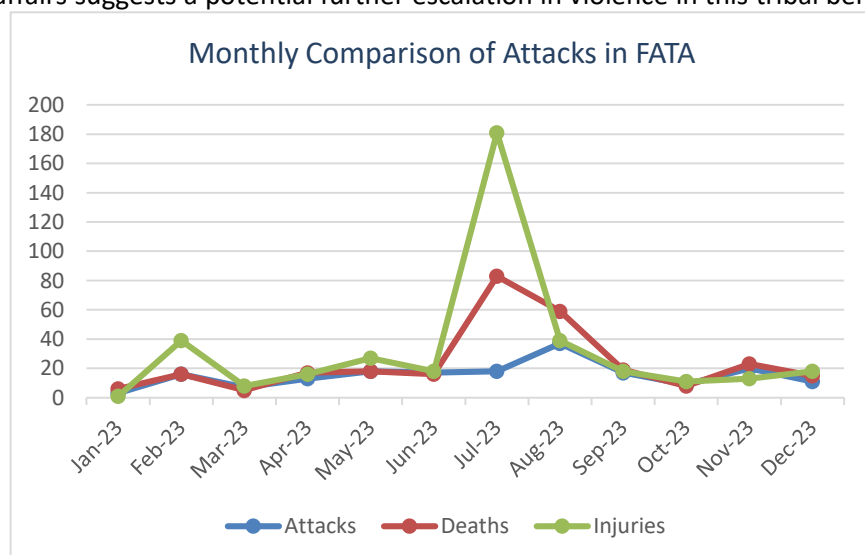
Security Situation in erstwhile erstwhile FATA

The security situation in the erstwhile FATA (merged districts of KP) region exhibited a concerning deterioration throughout 2023, marked by a substantial increase in militant attacks. The region witnessed 186 such incidents, resulting in 295 fatalities and 362 injuries. Comparatively, in 2022, the erstwhile FATA region experienced 116 militant attacks, leading to 179 deaths and 138 injuries. In 2021, there were 103 militant attacks in the region, resulting in 117 fatalities and 103 injuries. The comparison with 2022 reveals a significant 60 percent increase in militant attacks, a 65 percent surge in the number of fatalities, and a substantial 162 percent rise in the number of injuries.



Going back to 2020, the erstwhile FATA region had recorded 81 militant attacks, resulting in 106 deaths and 108 injuries. In 2019, there were 52 militant attacks, leading to 64 fatalities and 88 injuries. This trajectory indicates a deteriorating security situation in the erstwhile FATA over the last three years. The current state of affairs suggests a potential further escalation in violence in this tribal belt in 2024, underscoring the need for strategic measures to address the security challenges in the region.

The depicted figure illustrates a notable surge in militant attacks in August 2023. However, the highest toll in terms of fatalities and injuries occurred in July, marked by an attack orchestrated by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)



on a political gathering of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) in the Bajaur tribal district. The attack in July underscores ISKP's persistent targeting of religious-political personalities affiliated with JUI-F. Additionally, in Bajaur, the militant group strategically placed posters in various locations, denouncing democracy and issuing warnings against public participation in elections, deeming them as un-Islamic.

As the elections approach, there is a heightened risk that ISKP may intensify attacks targeting political gatherings, not only in Bajaur but potentially in other regions as well. This is a cause for concern, given the group's demonstrated presence and active engagement in the Bajaur tribal district. Notably, Bajaur shares proximity with Afghanistan's Kunar province, where ISKP maintains a substantial presence.

It is important to highlight that alongside ISKP, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) also maintains a presence in Bajaur, further complicating the security dynamics in the region. Vigilance and strategic measures are imperative to mitigate the potential impact of these militant groups on the political landscape and ensure the safety and security of public events, especially during the electoral process.

In 2023, while the Bajaur district recorded the highest number of deaths and injuries, violence persisted at significant levels in North Waziristan, Khyber, and South Waziristan. In North Waziristan, there were 64 militant attacks resulting in 86 fatalities and 94 injuries. Khyber witnessed 48 militant attacks, leading to 55 deaths and 62 injuries, while in South Waziristan, 22 militant attacks were recorded, causing 44 deaths and 38 injuries. The incidence of violence in these areas indicates ongoing security challenges.

Notably, the erstwhile FATA region experienced a higher number of suicide attacks in 2023 compared to the previous year. There were a total of 13 suicide attacks, with seven reported in North Waziristan, four in Khyber, and two in the Bajaur tribal district. These attacks involved various militant groups, including ISKP, TTP, the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, and Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan. Additionally, Lashkar-e-Islam resurfaced in the Tirah valley and the Bara area of Khyber district.

While Kurram tribal district witnessed only nine militant attacks, the region remained embroiled in sectarian conflicts, with two tribes of different sects engaging in violent confrontations. This highlights the complex nature of security challenges, encompassing not only militant attacks but also sectarian tensions that contribute to the overall instability in these areas. Vigilance and strategic measures are crucial to address these multifaceted security issues and maintain stability in the region.

TABLE 15: AFFECTED DISTRICTS IN FATA IN 2023

District	Nos	Killed					Injured					Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
North Waziristan	64	25	0	19	42	86	57	0	0	37	94	3	4
Khyber	48	36	0	12	7	55	51	0	5	6	62	1	2
Bajaur	39	2	0	2	90	94	9	0	0	145	154	0	0
South Waziristan	22	24	0	4	16	44	22	0	2	14	38	0	0
Kurram	9	5	0	0	7	12	3	0	0	10	13	0	0
Mohmand	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Orakzai	2	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Total	186	94	0	37	164	295	142	0	7	213	362	4	6

In 2023, a significant escalation in guerrilla attacks/assaults was evident in the erstwhile FATA, with the region experiencing 70 such militant assaults compared to 44 in the previous year. Similarly, there was a substantial increase in improvised explosive device (IED)-based attacks, rising from 22

incidents in 2022 to 43 in 2023. Furthermore, incidents of targeted killings also witnessed a notable uptick, increasing from 29 in 2022 to 42 in 2023.

These incidents of targeted killings not only aimed at security forces but also targeted tribal elders and other prominent personalities within the region. The rise in these various forms of attacks underscores the complexity and intensification of security challenges in the erstwhile FATA during the reported period. The targeting of key figures within the community indicates a deliberate effort by militant groups to disrupt stability, instill fear, and exert influence over the local population. Addressing these escalating security concerns will require a comprehensive and strategic approach to enhance the overall security and stability of the region.

TABLE 16: TYPE OF ATTACKS IN FATA IN 2023

Type	Nos	Killed					Injured					M Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
MA	70	48	0	23	14	85	59	0	7	30	96	3	0
IED	43	19	0	1	30	50	36	0	0	25	61	0	0
TK	42	10	0	0	37	47	0	0	0	7	7	0	0
SA	13	14	0	12	59	85	43	0	0	163	206	1	0
K	7	2	0	0	5	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
MrA	6	1	0	0	10	11	0	0	0	8	8	0	0
GrA	3	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0
RA	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	7	0	0
Total	186	94	0	36	155	285	142	0	7	240	389	4	6

During the reported period in the erstwhile FATA region, there was a notable increase in security forces' actions, marked by 94 notable operations. In these operations, security forces successfully neutralized 186 militants, injured 39 others, and arrested 52 suspected militants. However, the operations came at a cost, with 45 security forces personnel losing their lives and 10 others sustaining injuries in the line of duty.

Specifically, in North Waziristan, security forces conducted 37 notable operations, resulting in the elimination of 79 suspected militants, the injury of 30 others, and the arrest of 21 suspects. In South Waziristan, 74 suspected militants were killed, and 18 notable operations were conducted to maintain security. Additionally, in the Khyber district, 14 militants were killed, and 23 were apprehended, while in Bajaur, security forces eliminated 18 militants.

These security forces' actions reflect a proactive and targeted approach to counter the militant threat in the region. However, the sacrifices made by security forces underscore the challenges and risks associated with maintaining law and order in these areas. The strategic and sustained efforts of the security forces are crucial for mitigating security threats and fostering stability in the erstwhile FATA region.

NOTE: Despite the merger of erstwhile FATA with KP, PICSS depicted FATA and KP separately for a better understanding of the security environment.

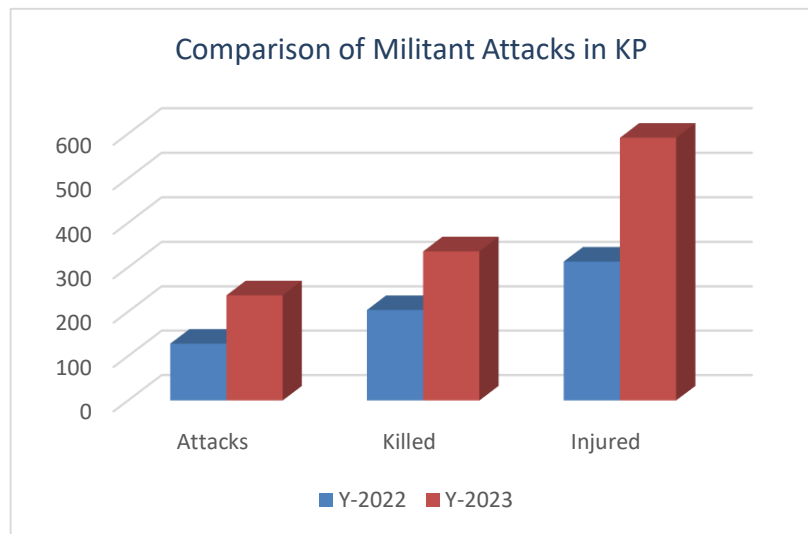
Security Situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP, KPK)

In 2023, the security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), excluding the erstwhile FATA or merged districts, further deteriorated, marked by a substantial increase in militant attacks. The province witnessed 237 such attacks, resulting in 336 fatalities and 591 injuries. In comparison, 2022 recorded 128 militant attacks in mainland KP, causing 204 deaths and 313 injuries, while 2021 had 58 militant attacks with 62 deaths and 58 injuries. The year 2023 saw an 85 percent rise in militant

attacks, a 65 percent increase in fatalities, and an 89 percent surge in injuries when compared to the preceding year.

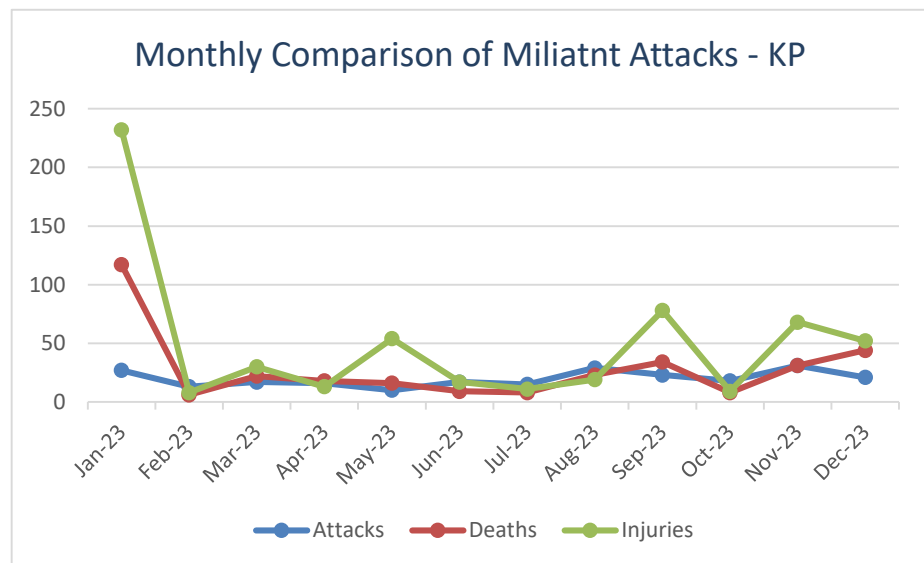
The improvement in the security situation in KP after Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan in 2014 and subsequent operations Khyber-I, II, and III in 2015 persisted until 2021. However, challenges emerged coinciding with the Afghan Taliban's offensive across the border and their subsequent assumption of government control in Kabul. The escalating trend of violence observed in

2022 and 2023 raises concerns, suggesting a strong possibility of further increases in violence within the province in the coming weeks and months. Vigilant measures and strategic interventions will be crucial to address and mitigate the security challenges facing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



The illustrated figure indicates that violence experienced a peak at the beginning of the year, followed by a fluctuating trend. Towards the year's end, there has been an observable increase in militant attacks. Notably, the police-line attack suicide bombing in January 2023 emerged as the most devastating incident, resulting in 102 fatalities and 215 injuries, predominantly among police personnel. Although initially claimed by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the group later distanced itself, suggesting the involvement of a faction within the TTP. While TTP officially claimed only

one suicide attack in KP, specifically in Bannu, the Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan asserted responsibility for four out of the ten reported suicide attacks in the province. Additionally, Ansar ul Jihad, a newly surfaced outfit, claimed one suicide attack in Tank district, targeting a police station through a combined gun-and-suicide assault. This implies that TTP may be employing alternate names to divert attention.



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The Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, having aligned itself with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), asserted responsibility for an attack on a Pakistan Army convoy in the Janikhel area of Bannu. Additionally, a suicide attack targeting living quarters and police barracks in the Hangu district was attributed to Daesh/ISKP. The intricate network of claimed attacks by diverse militant factions highlights the evolving dynamics and challenges within the security landscape of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Vigilant efforts and strategic measures are imperative to effectively address and mitigate the multifaceted threats posed by these groups. The situation underscores the need for a comprehensive and adaptive security approach to ensure the safety and stability of the region.

In addition to the provincial capital Peshawar, where 45 militant attacks were reported and 123 people were killed with 260 others injured, violence in mainland Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) was predominantly concentrated in the southern districts. This includes DI Khan, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank, and Karak districts, where almost 65 percent of the total attacks in the province occurred. Out of the 237 reported attacks in mainland KP, 154 militant attacks were documented in these southern districts, illustrating the significant security challenges faced by these areas.

Remarkably, seven out of the ten reported suicide attacks (two in Peshawar and one in Hangu) took place in the southern districts of KP. While the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliated groups, including various pseudonyms, were prominent actors in the southern districts, these groups also extended their presence into central districts such as Peshawar, Charsadda, Kohat, Mardan, and Nowshera. Concurrently, the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) maintained its presence mainly in Peshawar, targeting not only policemen but also members of the minority Sikh community. The multifaceted nature of militant activities across various districts underscores the complex security environment in mainland KP. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive and adaptive security strategies to safeguard the well-being and stability of the region.

TABLE 17: AFFECTED DISTRICTS IN KP IN 2023

District	Nos	Killed					Injured					M. Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
DI Khan	51	40	0	11	9	60	85	0	0	35	120	0	5
Peshawar	45	101	0	2	20	123	214	0	0	46	260	0	1
Lakki Marwat	39	17	0	9	7	33	26	0	0	3	29	0	0
Bannu	36	19	0	2	12	33	15	0	0	30	45	0	1
Tank	25	11	0	9	6	26	18	0	1	22	41	0	4
Charsadda	7	2	0	5	1	8	4	0	0	0	4	1	0
Kohat	7	3	0	0	0	3	4	0	0	2	6	0	0
Swabi	6	1	0	0	3	4	4	0	0	5	9	0	0
Hangu	4	7	0	2	7	16	0	0	0	17	17	0	0
Swat	3	2	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	1	2	0	0
Buner	2	1	0	3	1	5	2	0	0	0	2	0	0
Karak	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Lower Dir	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Mardan	2	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	0
Nowshera	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Upper Dir	2	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3	5	0	0
Chitral	1	4	0	12	0	16	5	0	42	0	47	0	0
Torghar	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	237	213	0	56	67	336	383	0	43	165	591	1	11

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) experienced a significant escalation in militant activities in 2023, marked by a notable increase in suicide attacks, guerilla attacks, targeted killings, and various other forms of violence. There were 10 reported suicide attacks during the year, a stark rise from the two incidents recorded in 2022. Furthermore, guerilla attacks, categorized as militant assaults (MA),

surged from 44 in 2022 to 108 in 2023, with 74 percent concentrated in southern districts, primarily targeting police stations and check posts.

The province witnessed 51 incidents of targeted killings, an increase from the 45 reported in the previous year. Victims primarily included policemen, alongside other prominent personalities, tribal elders, and religious leaders. Instances of improvised explosive device (IED)-based attacks increased from 11 in 2022 to 30 in 2023, indicating a heightened threat posed by explosive devices. There was also a slight increase in grenade attacks, rising from 22 in 2022 to 25 incidents in 2023.

In addition to these security challenges, 10 incidents of kidnapping were reported, resulting in fatalities and hostages. It is noted that there may be unreported cases due to the fear of harm to kidnapped individuals. Reports also indicated a growing trend of extortion from influential businessmen and prominent figures, suggesting that militant groups continued to fund their violent campaigns through such illicit activities. Additionally, reports surfaced of militant groups seeking protection money from companies, particularly those operating in southern districts. These developments underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by the security apparatus in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies to address and counteract these evolving threats.

TABLE 18: TYPE OF ATTACKS IN KP IN 2023

Type	Nos	Killed					Injured					M Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
MA	108	43	0	32	10	85	80	0	43	37	160	1	2
TK	51	31	0	0	26	57	1	0	0	1	2	0	0
IED	30	9	0	0	8	17	24	0	0	45	69	0	0
GrA	25	1	0	1	2	4	13	0	0	41	54	0	0
SA	10	128	0	23	18	169	265	0	0	41	306	0	0
K	10	1	0	0	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
RA	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	237	213	0	56	67	336	383	0	43	165	591	1	11

Security forces in mainland Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) executed 119 notable operations, resulting in the death of 177 militants and injuries to 21, while 119 others were apprehended. Significantly, 134 militants were targeted in 63 notable operations specifically conducted in the southern districts, addressing the heightened security challenges in these areas.

Despite ongoing threats where militants persistently targeted police and their installations, including vehicles, stations, and check-posts, the police demonstrated improved responses to thwart some of these attacks. Authorities bolstered the capabilities of the police force in troubled regions by providing advanced weaponry and modern gadgets. This strategic enhancement aimed to better monitor and counter the movements of militants, especially during nighttime operations.

In certain instances, the local populace actively assisted the police when militants attempted to target police stations. This collaboration between the community and law enforcement signifies a coordinated effort to bolster security measures and mitigate the impact of militant activities in the region. Such collaborative approaches are crucial for maintaining a robust and resilient security environment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Security Situation in Punjab

As predicted, there was a surge in militant attacks in Punjab during 2023, with 14 reported incidents resulting in 20 fatalities and 14 injuries. In 2022, the province had experienced three attacks, causing five deaths and 33 injuries, while in 2021, there were 10 attacks leading to 10 deaths and 87 injuries. The increase in militant activities in 2023 is noteworthy.

The district of Mianwali witnessed five of these attacks, including a significant assault on a Pakistan Air Force base and an attack on a police station. Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Sialkot each reported two attacks, while Khanewal, Sahiwal, and Taunsa Sharif districts reported one attack each. Given Mianwali's proximity to the troubled southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, militants sought to extend their attacks to adjacent districts of Punjab while also attempting to instigate disturbances in other parts of the province. In an attack claimed by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Khanewal, two officers of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) lost their lives. Among the 14 attacks in Punjab, six were claimed by TTP, one by Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP), and one by the Baloch National Army (BNA). The evolving threat landscape in Punjab underscores the need for vigilant security measures and proactive strategies to counteract militant activities in the province.

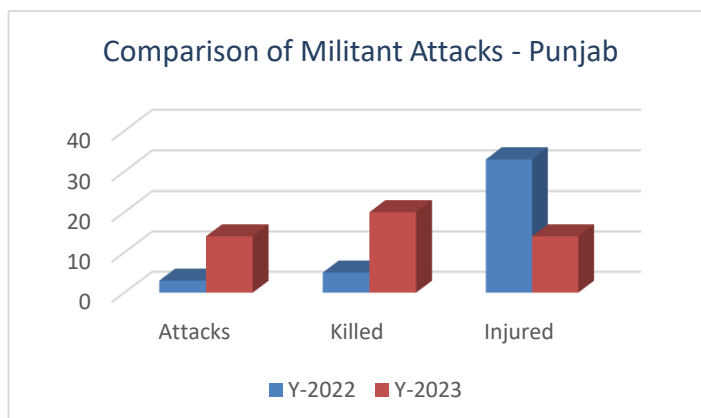


Table 19: Affected Districts of Punjab in 2023

District	Nos	Killed					Injured					M Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
Mianwali	5	1	0	12	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lahore	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	3	0	0
Rawalpindi	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Sialkot	2	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	1	0	2	0	0
Khanewal	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sahiwal	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	7	7	0	0
Taunsa	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	14	4	0	14	2	20	5	0	1	8	14	0	0

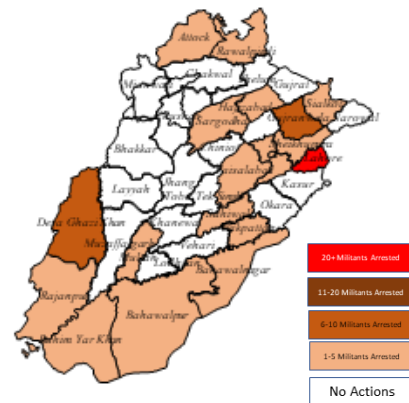
TABLE 20: TYPE OF ATTACKS IN PUNJAB IN 2023

Type	Nos	Killed					Injured					M Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
GrA	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0
IED	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	7	7	0	0
MA	9	2	0	12	1	15	3	0	0	1	4	0	0
TK	2	2	0	2	0	4	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Total	14	4	0	14	2	20	5	0	1	8	14	0	0

Significantly, security forces executed 74 prominent operations, resulting in the death of 10 suspected militants and the apprehension of a considerable number, totaling 330 suspects. The

proactive and enhanced intelligence-gathering efforts of the security forces, particularly the Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police, played a pivotal role in thwarting militants' attempts to expand their violent activities in Punjab.

Lahore, in particular, saw the arrest of 275 suspected militants, underscoring the city's significance in the militants' operational plans. Additionally, DG Khan and Gujranwala districts each witnessed the arrest of 10 suspected militants. The diverse affiliations of the arrested militants, spanning various outfits such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Daesh, Al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Sipah-e-Muhammad, indicate the concerted efforts of these militant groups to carry out their violent activities in these areas.



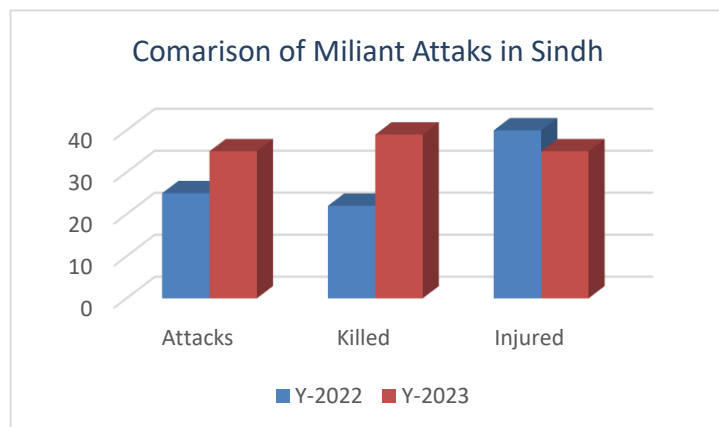
Source: PICSS Militancy Database

Despite the proactive measures taken by security forces to curb the activities of various militant groups, there remains a potential risk of significant attacks in Punjab. The districts adjacent to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's trouble zone are expected to face heightened threats in 2024. Ongoing vigilance and strategic interventions will be crucial to maintaining effective security in the region.

Security Situation in Sindh

The security situation in Sindh witnessed an increase in militant attacks in 2023, with 35 reported incidents, resulting in 39 fatalities and 35 injuries. This marks a significant rise compared to 2022 when 25 militant attacks were recorded, causing 22 deaths and 40 injuries. In comparison to the previous year, there was a 40% increase in militant attacks, accompanied by a 77% rise in deaths and a 13% decrease in injuries.

The majority of militant attacks in Sindh occurred in the provincial capital, Karachi, where 31 out of the 35 reported incidents took place. These attacks resulted in 35 deaths and 33 injuries. Notably, a coordinated gun-and-suicide attack on the Karachi Police Office, claimed by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), resulted in eight fatalities (including security forces personnel, attacking militants, and a civilian) and 18 injuries (mostly security forces personnel).



Other incidents in Sindh included an IED-based attack claimed by the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army in Khairpur district. The presence of Baloch militant groups such as the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), and Baloch Republican Guard (BRG) was noted in Karachi. Additionally, the Indian intelligence agency RAW was accused of disturbing peace by targeting a religious scholar and head of Jamia Abu Bakr Islamia, Zia ul Rehman, in Gulistan-e-Johar. Sectarian outfit Lashker-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for killing two policemen, and the group was suspected in the killing of a political activist from the Shia Muslim community.

Kashmore reported two militant attacks, while Khyberabad and Khairpur districts each reported one attack. The province experienced 22 incidents of targeted killings in 2023, compared to 12 in 2022. The security landscape in Sindh remained dynamic and presented challenges that required strategic responses to mitigate the evolving threats.

TABLE 21: AFFECTED DISTRICTS OF SINDH IN 2023

District	Nos	Killed					Injured					M Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
Karachi	31	10	0	6	19	35	24	0	1	8	33	0	2
Kashmore	2	1	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
Hyderabad	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Khairpur	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	35	11	0	6	22	39	24	0	1	10	35	0	2

TABLE 22: TYPE OF ATTACKS IN SINDH IN 2023

Type	Nos	Killed					Injured					M Arst	Kdnp
		SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
TK	22	5	0	2	17	24	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
GrA	4	0	0	0	2	2	3	0	0	5	8	0	0
MA	4	2	0	1	0	3	1	0	1	0	2	0	0
IED	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0
K	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
MrA	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
SA	1	4	0	3	1	8	17	0	0	1	18	0	0
Total	35	11	0	6	22	39	24	0	1	10	35	0	2

Security forces in Sindh conducted 33 notable operations in which two suspected militants were killed, and 49 suspects were arrested. The operations targeted militants affiliated with various groups, including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA), Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), Lashker-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Daesh, and Al-Qaeda.

The arrests made during these security forces actions were not limited to Karachi but extended to other districts such as Tando Mohammad Khan, Jamshoro, Dadu, Jacobabad, and Matiari. The significance of these operations is underscored by the arrest of seven suspected militants, six of whom were associated with the SRA, in five security forces actions in Jamshoro. This suggests that the SRA was actively attempting to foment trouble in the district.

The multi-pronged efforts of security forces in Sindh reflected the recognition of the diverse militant landscape in the province, necessitating comprehensive operations to address the varied threats posed by different militant outfits. The actions against militants associated with TTP, SRA, and other groups highlight the need for sustained vigilance and proactive measures to maintain security in the region.

Security Situation in AJK, ICT and GB

The overall security situation in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK), Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) remained stable, with one reported militant attack in each of these regions. The prominent attack occurred in GB's Diamir district, where unidentified militants targeted an Islamabad-bound passenger bus. The attack resulted in nine fatalities and 26 injuries. No group

claimed responsibility, and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) distanced itself from the incident. Authorities apprehended six suspects in connection with the bus attack.

In AJK, one militant attack was reported, while in ICT, an attack took place on the Sri Nagar Highway, resulting in an injury to a policeman. The security forces also conducted two notable actions in ICT. In one operation, two suspects allegedly associated with TTP were arrested, while in a separate incident, the Bomb Disposal Squad recovered a bag containing three hand grenades, a pistol, and a threatening letter targeting judges and generals from trail-5 in Margalla Hills. These developments highlight the importance of maintaining vigilance and taking proactive measures to address emerging security challenges in these regions.

INTERNAL CHALLENGES AND EXTERNAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Pakistan's Political Landscape: Serious Challenges Lie Ahead

Abdullah Khan

In Pakistan, the year 2023 saw some of the most extreme political turmoil in recent history. In January, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) dissolved two provincial assemblies. Despite losing power in center in April 2022, the party remained in power in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Imran Khan sought to put the central government under pressure to hold early elections. To do this, he directed the chief ministers of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to dissolve their respective assemblies. The then-CMs of Punjab Chaudhry Pervez Elahi and KP's Mehmood Khan were opposing dissolution of the assemblies but Imran Khan ignored their advice and directed them to dissolve the assembly, which they eventually did.

Because the constitution requires elections within 90 days of the dissolution of provincial or national assemblies, the PTI expected that if elections were held, it would form its government in these two provinces and would be in power when general elections for the national assembly were held. It was expected that this action would force the Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDM) administration to dissolve the national assembly and hold general elections in all provinces as well as for the national assembly.

Opponents accused the PTI and its leader, Imran Khan, of causing a constitutional crisis. The Pakistan Supreme Court acted suo moto to resolve the election postponement. The Election Commission offered many reasons for postponing the elections. The Supreme Court ordered elections to be held in May, but the instructions were not carried out because the federal administration claimed it lacked the necessary funding. All of these reasons amounted to a flagrant violation of the Constitution and Supreme Court orders. Even after 11 months, the caretaker government that was constituted for only 90 days is still in place in both provinces.

PTI's move to dissolve its own governments in two provinces turned out to be a shot in the foot as its leadership started to face legal actions everywhere. Imran Khan was booked in many cases at the same time. So far there are around 200 cases registered against him in different parts of the country. During his appearances in courts, thousands of his workers would come to agitate in front of the courts.

On May 9, 2023, Imran Khan was arrested from the premises of Islamabad High Court. PTI workers started well-coordinated protests in the entire country mostly in front of military garrisons and installations and at many places they became violent and torched, damaged, and destroyed properties at GHQ Rawalpindi, Corps Commander House Lahore, Corps Commander House Peshawar, Mianwali Air Base, and other places. The military said in its investigation that it was a well-planned attempt against the military leadership. Observers believe that it was a basically mutiny attempt against COAS General Asim Munir with the connivance of officers from inside the Army. The Army took disciplinary action against more than 100 of its officers and personnel. Wide-spread condemnation of the violence against military installations was seen in the entire country. The military leadership responded with stern actions. PTI's many workers and leaders were booked under the Army Act and they are facing trials in military courts while many others are in jails facing cases.

9th May became a turning point in Pakistan's history. PTI's entire leadership came under the ire of the state's response. Many key leaders either left the party and joined the newly formed Istehkam-e-Pakistan or Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentary (PTI-P) or announced their retirement from politics. Many of its leaders are still absconders. Imran Khan had demanded an independent inquiry into the incidents of May 9 however the state firmly believed that it was a conspiracy hatched by Imran Khan with the help of some officers from inside the Army. Eventually, Imran Khan was also arrested and is currently in jail facing different trials.

In August the national assembly and assemblies of the remaining two provinces were supposed to complete their tenure. But the PDM government in the center, PPP's government in Sindh and the BAP's government in Balochistan (all were part of PDM) dissolved the assemblies just two days before the completion of assemblies' tenure thus providing them additional 30 days for holding elections because if assemblies were dissolved after completing their tenure, elections were required to be held within 60 days – the period extends to 90 days if assemblies are dissolved before expiry of their tenure. During the last few days in power, the federal government got digital census approved thereby providing another reason for delaying elections as constitution warranted holding elections as per the latest census and thus election commission was bound to start new demarcation process.

Chief Justice Umar Ata Bindyal retired in September and Justice Qazi Faaiz Esa replaced him who showed keenness in holding the elections in time. Now the date is set for February 8, 2024, for the general elections in Pakistan. With the Supreme Court's intervention, it seems there might not be further delay in the elections. However, uncertainty about the future political outlook is still there. With the efforts to keep one of the major political parties Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf in check, there will be serious questions about the legitimacy and outcome of these elections.

While it may be too early to predict who will form the next government in centre and the provinces, there is every possibility that no single party would be able to form the government at its own, especially at the centre. Thus, there will be strong possibility of federal and provincial governments formed through coalitions of different parties. Thus, the year 2024 is least likely to see political stability in the country.

The writer is Managing Director At PICSS

Intolerance, Extremism and Mob Justice/ Violence

Gul Dad

The issue of intolerance, extremism and mob violence/ justice continued to haunt Pakistan with no letup in such incidents. Not only intolerance exists at political level but also at religious and sectarian levels. In a gruesome incident, an angry mob in Nankana Sahib district of Punjab in February 2023 stormed a police station snatched blasphemy accused Muslim man, identified as Muhammad Waris, from police custody and lynched him. The crowd also tried to burn his dead body. He was accused of desecrating pages of the Quran. In May, a Muslim religious leader Nigar Alam was beaten to death by the crowd during a political rally in Mardan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He was accused of blasphemous remarks in his speech.

One of the most notable incidents was reported from Punjab's Jaranwala area (Faisalabad district) in August when a crowd attacked a Christian community vandalising several churches and setting scores of houses on fire after accusing two of its members of desecrating the Quran. Earlier in April, employees working on Dasu hydroelectrical project tried to lynch a Chinese worker accusing him of blasphemy. The Chinese worker had to be airlifted by authorities to save him from the angry mob.

Incidents of angry mob targeting places of worship of Ahmediyya community (Qadians) continued to be reported from various parts of the country. In February, a place of worship belonging to the Ahmadi community was vandalised by miscreants in Saddar area of Karachi. The same place of worship was again targeted in September. Also in September, a place of worship of the Ahmediyya community was vandalized in Lahore's Shahdra area. Ahmediyya community also complained that graves of the community were vandalized in Daska city of Punjab. Such incidents are not limited to Punjab and Sindh only as a place of worship of Ahmediyya community was targeted in Kotli district of Azad Jammu and Kashmir in November.

Besides religious intolerance targeted against Christians and Ahmediyya community, militant groups tried to target members of Sikh community in KP especially in Peshawar. In March, an herbalist Dayal Singh was shot dead by unidentified assailants in his Dir Colony shop in Peshawar. Also in Peshawar, a member of Sikh community Manmohan Singh was killed outside his cosmetics shop in June. ISKP claimed responsibility.

Mob violence is not limited to religious issues as various incidents of lynching criminals by angry mob were also reported in various parts of the country especially in Karachi where crime rate has become a serious concern. In May, three suspected criminals, who later identified to be innocent, were beaten by angry mob in Orangi Town area of Karachi. Two of them died on the spot while the third one was rescued by police in critical condition. In June, one suspected robber was beaten to death by an angry mob in Orangi town while a similar incident was also reported from Qasba Colony where a suspect was killed by a mob while another was injured. In December, a suspected robber was killed in Orangi town while his accomplice managed to flee. In Korangi area of Karachi, two people were beaten by angry mob for allegedly stealing mobile phones killing one of them while critically injuring another in December. In March 2023, enraged traders lynched three suspected robbers in retaliation for the killing of a trader over resistance in Gulgasht Colony in Multan (Punjab province). The list of incidents may not be exhaustive.

Growing extremism, intolerance and mob violence is a serious concerns and stems from various factors and causes. In some cases, Pakistan's blasphemy laws were misused to settle personal scores. People also take law into their own hands as distrust is increasing on police, their prosecution and courts' ability to provide justice. Lack of rule of law and governance issues besides endemic poverty, ever increasing unemployment, crushing inflation and other socio-economic challenges contribute to extremism, intolerance and mob violence. Years of concerted efforts would be required for society to return to normalcy.

The writer is Director Research at PICSS

The Delicacy of Democracy: Pakistan in the 2024

Amir Jahangir

As Pakistan approaches the highly anticipated general elections scheduled for February 8, 2024, the political landscape is marked by complex interplay of factors, reflecting a nation at a critical juncture. Against the backdrop of recent political tumult, legal controversies, and a shifting balance of power between civilian and military institutions, the upcoming electoral process holds serious significance. The unfolding dynamics, characterized by the return of key political figures, the dissolution of established parties, and concerns over the integrity of the democratic process, underscore the need for a vigilant and informed electorate. As the country prepares to cast its votes,

the outcome of these elections will undoubtedly shape the trajectory of Pakistan's political future and its ongoing quest for democratic stability.

In the lead-up to Pakistan's forthcoming general elections in February, a recurring narrative unfolds, echoing a familiar political cycle. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan finds himself incarcerated with an extensive list of legal charges, while the return of three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, previously convicted and disqualified, is facilitated with the support of the military—an influential entity often referred to as the establishment in Pakistan.

Such oscillations in political fortunes are not unprecedented in the nation's history. The distinction in the present scenario lies in the intensity with which the state has pursued legal action against Imran Khan and his political party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), leading to a significant erosion of its influence. Following Khan's removal from power through a vote of no-confidence in April 2022, his direct confrontation with the military, attributed to his ouster, further strained democratic norms. This unprecedented clash has evolved into a zero-sum existential struggle, and habitually, the military appears to be prevailing. Consequently, Pakistan's democratic fabric is considerably weakened, casting doubt on the prospects of a free and fair election in February.

Imran Khan's legal challenges and the dissolution of PTI, Imran Khan, despite being the nation's most popular politician, has been detained since August on charges related to the inappropriate use of state gifts. Although he secured a suspension of his sentence shortly afterward, he remains under judicial remand for a separate state secret case. Khan alleges that the diplomatic cable involved in this case serves as evidence of a U.S. conspiracy to remove him from office, pointing to strained relations with the military as the underlying cause.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan approved the bail of former PTI chairman Imran Khan and Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi in the cipher case. The apex court accepted the PTI leaders' petition against the high court verdict in the case. They have been granted bail in exchange for bail bonds of Rs1 million each.

A three-member bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Acting Chief Justice of Pakistan Sardar Tariq Masood and comprising Justice Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Athar Minallah, heard the petitions of Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood against the Islamabad High Court verdict in the cipher case.

The state contended that Khan mishandled the cipher, leading to a violation of the Official Secrets Act, hastily amended in August. Former Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, a key figure in Khan's PTI, is also detained in connection with the cipher case, marking a deliberate effort to sideline Khan within the political landscape.

Khan's initial arrest in May triggered widespread protests, some of which escalated to target military installations, prompting a forceful crackdown by the state. The subsequent imprisonment of PTI members, along with coercive measures to compel senior leaders to distance themselves from Khan, has further tilted the civil-military balance, already precarious, in favor of the military.

The Unbalanced Civil-Military Dynamics in the post-Khan era, beginning with the coalition named the Pakistan Democratic Movement, witnessed a concerning regression in the country's democratic norms and a notable expansion of the military's influence over a 16-month period. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, aligned with the establishment, presided over a series of hastily enacted

legislations criticized by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan for their draconian scope. Amendments to the Official Secrets Act conferred extensive powers to the intelligence agency, allowing raids on mere suspicion, while the Pakistan Army (Amendment) Act of 2023 criminalized criticism of the military and granted it a role in national development and strategic interests.

These legislative maneuvers, executed without substantial debate, underscore the military's augmented powers. The army chief's inclusion in the newly formed Special Investment Facilitation Council, responsible for foreign investment and economic growth, further exemplifies the military's extended reach. The ongoing use of the Official Secrets Act in Khan's cipher case emphasizes the intertwining of legal and political strategies.

The Return of Mian Nawaz Sharif (MNS) After an extended stay in London, Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan in October with apparent support from the military. Despite his previous imprisonment on corruption charges, Sharif's anti-establishment stance during his exile shifted upon his brother Shehbaz assuming the prime ministership in April 2022. Sharif's return and the overturning of his convictions, coupled with prominent politicians defecting to his party, indicate the military's backing. Notably, his speech at the Minar-e-Pakistan in Lahore, a politically significant venue, reinforces the endorsement from the right quarters.

While preparations for Sharif's potential return as prime minister are underway, uncertainties surround his electoral performance in a context of changing voter demographics. Shehbaz's government, perceived as controlled by Nawaz from London, faced public disapproval during its 16-month tenure. Shifts in voter preferences, particularly among younger, urban, middle-class demographics favoring Khan's PTI, pose challenges to Sharif's electoral prospects.

Given the extensive pre-poll political interventions, prospects for a free and fair election in February seems dim. Delays in holding provincial assembly elections, along with the perception of a caretaker government appointed by and accountable to the military, raise doubts about the democratic integrity of the upcoming polls.

The prevailing notion is that the election will proceed once Khan has been sidelined, ensuring a favorable outcome for Sharif. However, questions linger over the establishment's ability to ensure such an outcome without resorting to election-day interference.

The current state of Pakistan's democracy, reaching its nadir since 2008, prompts uncertainties about its further deterioration. The military's ascendancy, exercising decision-making authority and political influence without overt control, signifies a pattern that yields short-term stability at the expense of long-term progress.

Pakistan's military, positioning itself as the country's most competent institution, now holds unprecedented power, reminiscent of its peak in 2008. This concentration of authority, while achieving short-term stability, has historically led to prolonged stagnation. Curiously, Washington, despite its proclaimed commitment to global democracy, has remained conspicuously silent on Pakistan's democratic backsliding. The preference for the military over civilian governments has been evident over the years, shaping the dynamics to the detriment of Pakistan's democratic aspirations.

Pakistan's historical relationship with the United States has often been a barometer signaling significant developments in the region. The ebb and flow of this alliance have mirrored pivotal moments in South Asian geopolitics. Presently, the renewed focus on the prospects of a conflict in the

region prompts careful evaluation. The intricate dance between Pakistan and the United States has, in the past, been emblematic of emerging regional shifts, geopolitical realignments, or heightened tensions. The nuanced dynamics suggest that the current scrutiny may indicate an impending development of considerable consequence. Whether it pertains to regional security concerns, diplomatic maneuvers, or strategic partnerships, the evolving relationship between Pakistan and the United States remains a key factor in decoding the broader geopolitical landscape in South Asia.

Imran Khan's attribution of his ouster to the United States, coupled with the military's longstanding status as the preferred partner, underscores the delicate diplomatic balance. As the possibility of further election delays or interference looms, the Biden administration faces a crucial juncture to articulate its stance on democratic principles. However, the delayed response may limit the impact of any intervention, emphasizing the importance of timely and assertive diplomatic engagement in safeguarding democratic values in Pakistan.

Against the backdrop of historical indicators and the recent trip of the Chief of Army Staff, General Syed Asim Munir's recent visit to the United States, suggests a desire to establish close relationship between Pakistan and the United States, especially during the crucial geopolitical junctures. The recent developments have further heightened attention. The meeting between the Pakistan Army Chief and the commander of the U.S. Central Command underscores the ongoing evaluation of prospects for conflict in the region. The discussions centering on cooperation in regional security matters highlight the nuanced dynamics of the Pakistan-U.S. relationship, which has traditionally served as a diplomatic barometer for significant events in South Asia. As this dialogue unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident that the evolving partnership between Pakistan and the United States will play a pivotal role in shaping the broader geopolitical landscape of the region.

Amidst the evolving landscape of global politics, there is a growing imperative for Pakistan to assume a more geo-economic position. However, the custodians of power within the country exhibit a notable confidence in preserving the longstanding geo-strategic advantage that Pakistan can bring to the table. This dichotomy encapsulates the complex decision-making at the intersection of politics and international relations. While the global context emphasizes the significance of economic engagement and cooperation, the power corridors in Pakistan remain steadfast in valuing the geo-strategic advantages that have historically defined the nation's role. Striking a delicate balance between these two imperatives becomes a pivotal challenge, requiring astute diplomatic navigation and strategic decision-making to position Pakistan optimally in the dynamic theater of global affairs.

This contemplation offers a foresight into the potential role that Pakistan might assume amid the transformative dynamics of its neighboring nations. In the context of an evolving and enlightened Saudi Arabia, a diplomatically recalibrating Iran, a Turkey engaging in more interconnected trade, a stubborn Russia refusing to backdown, and the enduring dominance of China, alongside the dynamics with India, Pakistan finds itself at a crucial nexus. The strategic positioning of Pakistan becomes increasingly nuanced as it navigates relationships with these key regional players. The changing dynamics in the Middle East, coupled with the global influence of China, present opportunities and challenges that demand a comprehensive and forward-looking approach from Pakistan. How Pakistan shapes its role within this intricate geopolitical puzzle will not only impact its national trajectory but also contribute to the evolving narrative of regional and global geopolitics.

Internally, the crux of the challenge lies in navigating the complex interplay between the influential military elite and the fragmented landscape of political parties in Pakistan. The powerful military, historically a significant force in shaping the nation's destiny, holds considerable sway over the country's strategic decisions and security policies. Concurrently, the political parties, grappling with internal divisions and external pressures, strive to decipher the emerging realities that will shape their roles and influence in the coming days.

This intricate tango between the military and political entities reflects a delicate balance of power, with both sides seeking to assert their interests and navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape. As aspirations and ambitions clash within these spheres, the challenge is to find a harmonious equilibrium that aligns with the national interest. The outcome of this power struggle will not only define Pakistan's political future but also determine how the nation positions itself in the face of emerging global and regional dynamics. The ability of the military and political factions to find common ground amid these intricate challenges will be pivotal in steering Pakistan through a period of critical transformation.

The overarching question persists, post February elections, will the incoming administration manage to instill stability and uphold consistent policies, or will Pakistan grapple with an enduring struggle toward achieving genuine democratic governance? The prospect of political satisfaction appears elusive, and the prevailing uncertainty leaves room for contemplation regarding the potential emergence of a more technocratic setup. If the anticipated election outcomes align with those deemed unfavorable by certain influential figures, the trajectory toward a technical administration might gain traction. The delicate balance between political forces and the quest for enduring democratic norms continues to cast a shadow over the forthcoming political landscape in Pakistan, underscoring the challenges and uncertainties that lie ahead.

As Pakistan approaches a potentially transformative period, characterized by shifts in political power, the citizens of the country find themselves in a state of anticipation for effective governance. Unfortunately, amidst the diminishing noise of accountability, concerns about governance, and allegations of political favoritism, the prospect of tangible and inclusive governance appears increasingly distant. The citizens, eagerly awaiting meaningful policies and initiatives, are caught in the complexities of a political landscape marked by challenges such as responsibility debates, administrative shortcomings, and perceptions of biased decision-making. Navigating through this tumultuous environment, the hope for governance that addresses the needs and aspirations of the people remains a distant yet crucial goal for the future of Pakistan.

The author is a global competitiveness, risk, and development expert. He leads Mishaal Pakistan, the country partner institute of the Future Economic and Societies Platform at the World Economic Forum.

"Safeguarding Pakistan's Food Sovereignty: An Odyssey of a Vision"

Muhammad Nadeem Iqbal

In the heartland of South Asia, where the Indus River whispers tales of ancient civilizations, a contemporary challenge looms large over Pakistan's horizon – the specter of food insecurity. As the

custodian of Organic Pakistan, I embark on an odyssey of a vision for a self-sustaining, food-efficient Pakistan, weaving a narrative of innovation, resilience, and unwavering commitment to safeguard our nation's food sovereignty.

The journey begins by acknowledging the historical nuances that have shaped our agricultural landscape. Agriculture, the cornerstone of our identity, has often been relegated to the sidelines. It's time to cast a new vision, one that transcends the confines of convention and propels us into a future where the soil beneath our feet becomes a source of abundance and pride.

In the fields where our farmers toil, we find the crucible of our aspirations. A historical lack of diversification and insufficient investment in research and development have left our agricultural sector vulnerable. The land, once teeming with potential, beckons for rejuvenation. It's a moment where necessity compels us to adopt "Out-of-Box thinking," a moment where innovation becomes an indicator of change.

Our immediate actions and concerns should be a testament to this commitment. Diversifying food imports and establishing emergency reserves are not mere strategies; they are lifelines for a nation grappling with the urgency of food scarcity. These actions are a clarion call for collective responsibility, urging us all to stand in solidarity with our farmers, the custodians of our sustenance.

As we navigate the mid-term and long-term goals of this approach, the landscape needs to be transformed. Agricultural innovation needs to become the compass guiding us through uncharted territories. Stronger extension services and a reimagining of land-use planning lay the groundwork for a resilient and sustainable future. The unveiling of a comprehensive national agriculture policy is not just a document; it should be the blueprint for a renaissance in our agricultural practices.

This narrative doesn't stop at the fields; it meanders into the heart of our urban spaces. Urban agriculture should become a protagonist in our approach, transforming concrete landscapes into fertile grounds. Rooftop gardens, vertical farming, and community-based agriculture are the brushstrokes that paint a picture of self-sufficiency and resilience in our cities.

In Pakistan's approach to this revolution, the Pakistan Army needs to play a leading role, a strategic alliance with the forces that safeguard our borders, can be the savior of our food sovereignty. Urban farming becomes a tool for self-sufficiency, aligning with our commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The armed forces, our guardians, can lead the charge in sustainable urban development, contributing not only to our national resilience but also to global aspirations for a secure food future.

With a population exceeding 240 million, Pakistan faces the monumental task of ensuring food security. Agriculture steps into this crucial role, producing staples like wheat, rice, and maize, the bedrock of the nation's diet. By doing so, it not only feeds the masses but also mitigates the need for expensive food imports, fortifying food security and preserving precious foreign exchange reserves.

The economic significance of agriculture is underscored by its contribution to Pakistan's GDP, a substantial 24% during the fiscal year 2022-2023, as per the Pakistan Economic Survey. This enduring influence reinforces the sector's pivotal role in the country's overall economic output.

Agriculture isn't just about crops; it's about people. Over 42.3% of Pakistan's labor force, particularly in rural areas, depends on agriculture for their livelihoods. These hardworking individuals are the backbone of this essential source of employment.

Agricultural exports serve as a financial lifeline for Pakistan, contributing nearly 80% to the nation's total exports. From rice to cotton, citrus, and other fruits and even untapped high value cash crops, these products find their way to international markets, with rice alone earning an impressive \$2.54 billion in the fiscal year 2021, according to the Pakistan Rice Exporters Association.

More than just a sector, agriculture is a lifeline for millions, particularly in rural areas. Farmers, livestock keepers, and agricultural laborers rely on it for income and survival. Investment in the farm sector can lead to poverty reduction and improved living standards in these regions.

Despite its monumental contributions, Pakistan's agriculture sector faces numerous challenges – water scarcity, outdated practices, inefficient R&D support, lack of value-added supply-chains poor market access, inadequate infrastructure, un-trained labor and farm managers, soil degradation, pests, diseases, and the looming specter of climate change. To unlock its full potential, Pakistan must invest in R&D, skill development, modernizing farming techniques, improving irrigation systems, and promoting sustainable practices.

Recognizing the paramount importance of agriculture, the Government of Pakistan has established the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). This "single window" entity aims to facilitate investors, foster inter-departmental cooperation, and expedite project development, with a focus on attracting substantial investments from the Gulf Cooperation Council.

SIFC adopts a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders. Its primary goal is to harness Pakistan's latent opportunities in critical sectors, including agriculture, by encouraging domestic and foreign investments. It can showcase the sector's potential, streamline investment procedures, encourage local and international investors to inject capital into agricultural projects, leading to modernization, increased productivity, and technological advancements.

Facilitating partnerships between local farmers, agribusinesses, and international agricultural technology companies can enhance farm productivity and efficiency through the transfer of modern farming practices, equipment, and technologies.

SIFC can play a pivotal role in advocating for and coordinating rural infrastructure development projects, including improvements to transportation networks, irrigation systems, and storage facilities. By collaborating with government agencies and trade bodies, SIFC can help farmers and agricultural businesses access domestic and international markets more efficiently, involving trade negotiations, quality control measures, and the development of value-added agricultural products for export.

From an investors' perspective, despite its ambitious goals, the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) faces several limitations that impact its effectiveness in transforming Pakistan's agriculture sector. One significant challenge lies in the dependency on investor interest and the unpredictable nature of global economic conditions. The success of SIFC relies on attracting substantial investments, and fluctuations in the international economic landscape can impede the realization of this goal. Moreover, navigating policy challenges within Pakistan's bureaucratic framework poses another hurdle. SIFC's ability to streamline processes and foster cooperation among government departments is contingent on overcoming bureaucratic inefficiencies, which can hinder the expeditious development of agricultural projects. Resource constraints also present a limitation, as the council needs sufficient funding and support to execute its proposed initiatives successfully.

Additionally, the efficacy of SIFC in facilitating technology transfer, infrastructure development, and market access depends on the collaboration of various stakeholders, and achieving

this synergy poses a continuous challenge. It is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders to address these limitations systematically to ensure that SIFC can effectively contribute to the transformation of Pakistan's agriculture sector.

As I, Muhammad Nadeem Iqbal, articulate this vision, I extend an invitation – an invitation to all sectors of society. This is not a journey for the few but a collective odyssey. Government agencies, non-profit organizations, private enterprises, and, most importantly, our farmers, are stakeholders in this transformative narrative.

Our vision transcends the immediate challenges we face. It is a commitment to fortifying Pakistan's autonomy and contributing to a more secure global food system. As the pages of time turn, we are not just safeguarding our food security; we are crafting a legacy of resilience and commitment, a legacy that echoes through the fertile fields of our beloved nation.

In closing, we extend a call to action. Let us collaborate, innovate, and fortify our autonomy. Together, we are not just cultivating crops; we are cultivating a vision of prosperity, resilience, and an enduring commitment to the well-being of Pakistan and its people. The odyssey continues, and the future beckons us to sow the seeds of a bountiful and sovereign tomorrow.

The writer is as Editor Special Projects and Group Director at JANG GROUP/GEO Television Network and the Custodian of ORGANIC PAKISTAN (LLP)

Pakistan's Economic Conundrum in 2023: Not Much Silver Linings in 2024

Gul Dad & Ishfaq Hussain

Pakistan's economic woes continued in 2023 and the country went to the brink of an economic default. Pakistan's economic conundrum was characterized by a series of obstacles that included prolonged negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), steep currency depreciation, surging inflation, and a credit downgrade by international rating agencies.

In January 2023, the country found itself navigating economic uncertainties as government efforts to artificially control the exchange rate and secure loans from friendly nations faced setbacks. Initial resistance to stringent IMF conditions hindered negotiations, eventually leading to Pakistan's acceptance of the IMF's terms. The removal of the exchange rate cap resulted in a rapid depreciation of the Pakistani rupee, accompanied by a State Bank of Pakistan interest rate hike to 17 percent, aimed at curbing anticipated inflation resulting from mandated increases in fuel, electricity, and gas prices.

As discussions with the IMF extended into February, parliamentary debates over new taxes demanded by the IMF triggered credit downgrades by Fitch Ratings and Moody's. Inflation surged to 31.6 percent, prompting the State Bank of Pakistan to further raise interest rates to 20 percent. Despite Finance Minister Ishaq Dar's indications of progress, the delay in reaching a staff-level agreement heightened anxiety in financial markets. Rumours circulated regarding IMF demands related to Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs, firmly rejected by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

Strategic considerations emerged as a significant factor behind the delay, with speculation about the U.S. using the IMF to influence Pakistan's actions. While guarantees from Saudi Arabia and the UAE provided some relief, the risk of default increased. China's rollover of a \$2 billion loan indicated ongoing challenges in securing the crucial IMF tranche. By May 2023, Pakistan's economic

situation worsened, with a significant cut in the GDP growth estimate and warnings of a potential default if the IMF bailout plan was not secured. In May, inflation reached historic highs of 37.97 percent year-on-year.

The government grappled with identifying relief areas, and political instability further complicated economic troubles. Moody's warned of a possible default if the IMF deal was not secured. In June 2023, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar presented the economic survey, revealing a meager GDP growth of 0.29 percent. Inflation remained high at 28.2 percent, and tax collection targets were missed. The federal government presented a budget with short-term political goals to navigate through the economic crisis.

Efforts to secure the IMF tranche intensified with diplomatic outreach to global capitals. The government modified the budget to meet IMF conditions, eventually securing a staff-level agreement. While the IMF lifeline provided temporary relief, the country's economic challenges persisted. In August 2023, Pakistan faced a severe economic downturn, leading to widespread socio-political unrest. The uncertain political landscape, coupled with impending elections, significantly impacted the country's economic situation.

The government responded to IMF demands by raising electricity prices and imposing additional taxes to boost revenue, exacerbating challenges for a population already grappling with record inflation. Nationwide protests, demonstrations, and strikes underscored the gravity of the situation. The caretaker government, constrained by its limited mandate, struggled to provide relief, citing its commitment to IMF agreements.

As socio-political unrest intensified, the government further raised petrol and diesel prices, surpassing Rs300 per liter for the first time in the country's history. Simultaneously, the petroleum levy on petrol was increased to meet another IMF requirement. The stock exchange suffered losses, and the local currency experienced a significant decline. Despite efforts by the caretaker setup to address economic challenges, the absence of a long-term policy framework hindered effective navigation of the crisis.

In September, the State Bank of Pakistan implemented measures to stabilize the rupee, while Pakistan decided to initiate measures to curb smuggling and other illegal economic activities. Earlier, in June, Pakistan set up a Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) — a civil-military hybrid forum — to fast-track decision-making and promote investment from foreign nations, particularly Gulf countries. In September, Army chief General Asim Munir engaged with the business community to ease their nerves. Both the Army chief and caretaker Prime Minister Anwar ul Kakar assured substantial foreign investments (\$100 billion) from Gulf countries, with \$25 billion each from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. These investments would cover various sectors, including mines and minerals, agriculture, defense production, and information technology.

Despite these efforts, challenges persisted, marked by inflation, petrol price hikes, and unexpected crises such as the sugar shortage. The economic difficulties extended into September, with electricity bills further burdening consumers. The caretaker government faced criticism for its inability to provide relief, attributing it to rejected proposals by the IMF. The sudden increase in petroleum prices and emerging crises in sugar and wheat heightened the challenges. Although the government reduced petroleum prices, inflation remains unchecked.

Pakistan's economic journey in 2023 reflects the delicate balance required to navigate the storms of IMF negotiations, political turmoil, and socio-economic unrest. While the IMF agreement offered temporary relief, achieving sustainable economic recovery necessitates addressing underlying issues and fostering international cooperation. The delayed elections, ongoing political uncertainty, etc underscore the complexities of Pakistan's economic landscape. Efforts to stabilize the economy must be coupled with long-term policy frameworks, structural reforms, and international collaboration. Pakistan's ability to achieve political stability and implement effective economic measures will determine its trajectory toward a more stable economic future. Inter alia, political stability, or lack of it, will determine Pakistan's future economic outlook.

Gul Dad is Director Research at PICSS

Ishfaq Hussain is Research Assistant at PICSS

Charting the Course: Analysis of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in 2023 and Strategic Prospects for 2024

Salman Javed

The convoluted landscape of South Asian geopolitics witnessed a complex interplay of challenges and strategic moves in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations throughout 2023. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), operating from Afghan territory, emerged as a catalyst for the deterioration of bilateral ties, setting the stage for a deeper exploration into the historical context, ideological underpinnings, and regional dynamics that define this critical relationship. As we unravel the events of 2023, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced landscape that may shape the trajectory of Pak-Afghan relations in the coming year.

Challenges in 2023

On TTP

The year 2023 unfolded with the TTP intensifying its attacks within Pakistan, particularly in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The TTP's resurgence, post the Taliban's takeover of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) in August 2021, posed a direct threat to Pakistan's security. Struggling with the spillover effects, Pakistan consistently urged the IEA to address the TTP issue, creating a backdrop of heightened tensions.

A significant turning point arose as the IEA demonstrated a noticeable sympathy for the TTP, driven by nationalist perspectives; This sympathy was not merely a passive acknowledgment but a strategic alignment driven by nationalist perspectives within certain factions of the IEA. In their view, the TTP represented a potential tool against Pakistan, a stance that further fuelled the already tense relationship between the two neighbouring nations.

Concurrently, suspicions began to take root within Afghanistan regarding Pakistan's alleged support for the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). The IEA, navigating internal security challenges and grappling with the intricacies of regional dynamics, publicly asserted that ISKP members originated from Pakistan. This bold accusation added a new layer to the already complex dynamics, intensifying suspicions and sowing the seeds for a protracted and damaging counter-narrative war.

The counter-narrative war, fuelled by mutual accusations and rebuttals, became a central feature of the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship. Pakistan raised legitimate concerns about the TTP's activities, its access to sophisticated weapons and collaboration of Afghan nationals with the TTP. Pakistan sought collaboration to mitigate the spillover effects, the IEA responded with allegations of Pakistan's involvement with ISKP. This strategy, rooted in insecurity and diplomatic manoeuvring, perpetuated a cycle of distrust and further strained the already delicate ties between the two countries.

Repatriation Efforts and Economic Strains

Further complicating the scenario, Pakistan initiated a repatriation drive to address the issue of illegal or undocumented immigrants, primarily Afghans. While Pakistan remained Afghanistan's primary trading partner, bilateral trade reaching \$135.30 million in August 2023, the closure of border crossings and repatriation efforts strained economic ties.

In response, attempts were made by the Interim Government of Afghanistan, led by the Taliban, to expand their regional diplomatic footprint to reduce dependence on Pakistan. This strategic shift was evident in Mullah Baradar's visit to Iran, strategically seeking alternatives amid repatriation challenges initiated by both Pakistan and Iran. However, it is interesting to note that Afghanistan's interim government criticized Pakistan's repatriation plan for Afghan immigrants, leaving out Iran, despite the fact that hundreds of illegal Afghans have been shot since the takeover of Kabul by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) at the Afghan-Iran border.

Shared-Water Issues and Regional Dynamics

The shared-water issue took center stage with Afghanistan's unilateral announcement of a dam on the Chitral-Kunar River, potentially funded by India. This project, with its feasibility and funding promised by India in the previous regime, added a layer of complexity to an already intricate relationship, raising concerns about water access and regional cooperation.

Despite these challenges, a glimmer of hope emerged in November 2023. The Acting Commerce Minister of the IEA visited Pakistan for trilateral talks between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan, highlighting a commitment to regional connectivity through the Trans-Afghan project—a 760-kilometer rail line. This initiative, scheduled for completion by 2027, emphasized the intricate dynamics at play in the region.

Anticipated Evolution in 2024

As we anticipate the evolution of Pak-Afghan relations in 2024, a nuanced understanding of key factors becomes imperative. The ideological perspectives of the IEA and its domestic political dynamics will continue to shape this relationship. Shifts in Afghanistan's governance and the changing preferences of the Afghan Taliban necessitate a comprehensive reassessment of Pakistan's strategic stance.

Historical contexts, notably Pakistan's role during the War on Terror, contribute to a trust deficit between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan. The shared ideology with the TTP, rooted in Pakistan's historical alliance with the United States during the Afghan War, adds a layer of tension within the IEA.

In navigating these complexities, the ongoing economic, security, and ideological dimensions reveal a delicate balance between policy imperatives and certain ideologies. The deepening

divergence in expectations and mutual distrust poses challenges, with Pakistan seeking decisive measures against the TTP and a cessation of anti-Pakistan narratives in Afghanistan.

Addressing this divide necessitates transparent dialogues with various stakeholders, including China, the US, Iran, and Central Asian countries. Recognizing Pakistan's contributions post-US withdrawal could pave the way for mutual cooperation, with border management and trade facilitation playing pivotal roles.

Conclusion

Hence, the evolving dynamics between Pakistan and Afghanistan in 2024 are likely to be shaped by historical interactions, ideological perceptions, and regional complexities. As Afghanistan's Taliban-led government seeks stability while being cautious about being perceived as "Pakistan's assets," the delicate balance between policy imperatives and shared ideologies remains central.

As Pakistan confronts these challenges, a comprehensive re-evaluation of its strategic approach becomes imperative to effectively navigate the multifaceted issues arising from its proximity to Afghanistan in the year ahead. The path forward requires transparent dialogues, economic considerations, and a commitment to bridge the trust deficit, laying the foundation for a more stable and cooperative future between these neighboring nations.

The writer is Director General Pak Afghan Youth Forum

Evolving US Strategy towards Pakistan

Dr Farah Naz

The US Mission in Pakistan priorities indicate that there is a focus on shared responsibilities for action against militant and terrorist groups and the US encourages Pakistan to enhance counterterrorism cooperation. In the field of nuclear security, the US expects Pakistan to maintain nuclear security, promote strategic stability and encourage Pakistan to engage diplomatically with India. Civil rights including women and minorities are also on the priority list. The recent policy document strongly emphasizes economic growth and climate issues. The important point for consideration is enhancing the capacity of civilian institutions at the expense of military capabilities. The US further expects Pakistan to ensure its military capabilities do not pose a threat to the US or its allies or partners. Along with that, expect Pakistan to establish diplomatic relations with India, support initiatives promoting human rights and stability in Afghanistan along with hosting Afghan refugees and return Afghan refugees when conditions in Afghanistan support sustainable repatriation. But here the question comes to mind: why such a drastic change in US priorities towards Pakistan? This is what leads us to further question: Has the US, under President Joe Biden, revisited its terms of engagement with Pakistan and why does the US expect Pakistan to ensure its military capabilities do not pose a threat to the US or its allies or partners?

The answer to the above question is both yes and no! Pakistan's strong commitment to its bilateral relations with the US is evident from fighting Jihad for the US against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the late 1980s to the Global War on Terror in 2000 until the US troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021, for decades Pakistan stood firmly with the US at the cost of its people, peace and prosperity.

Since 2001, Pakistan has partnered with the US on the Global War on Terror. But this alliance cost Pakistan immensely in terms of financial and human losses such as a \$130 Billion loss to the economy and around 80,000 people of Pakistan lost their lives. This reflects Pakistan's strong resolve

to fight against terrorism. No other country to the best of my knowledge has sacrificed so much in standing with the US in fighting terrorism. This loss is still occurring in terms of bombing, suicide attacks, militancy, terrorism and phases of violent extremism that prevail in society. With the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, there has been some uncertainty and disquiet about the relevance and nature of our relationship. Debates were held in Islamabad and Washington. Realists said rightsize or downsize it; the pragmatists suggested exploring new avenues to advance mutual interests. Despite such speculations, Pakistan has helped the US with massive evacuations from Afghanistan since 2021 and continues to do so. According to official statements, around 700 people are evacuated from Islamabad every week at the wishlist of the US and its allies.

According to Ambassador Masood Khan, diplomacy has brought our engagement to an even keel thus leading to public pronouncements by the leadership of the two countries that Pak-US relations have been de-hyphenated. But, what is meant by de-hyphenated? Well, de-hyphenated means Pak-US relations are separated from the prism of Afghanistan and India. It is neither Af-Pak nor Indo-Pak, but Pak-US. We have been assured that even China would not be a new hyphen. This seems to be a new prism in decades of Pak-US relations! But will it sustain keeping in mind the evolving geo-political and geo-economic situation?

In terms of collaboration, Pak-US has a wide array of security and non-security partnerships. In the security context, both countries have defence, military and intelligence sharing ties, they conduct joint armed forces exercises and various training, UN Missions etc. In terms of non-security affairs, both countries closely collaborate in the fields of energy, trade and investment, education and healthcare, clean energy and combating the climate crisis, technology, Afghanistan stabilization, counterterrorism and counter-piracy operations. We believe a harmonious strategic alignment will create a salutary environment for scaling up our bilateral ties, especially in the economic, technological, and educational domains.

In the field of health, to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, the US delivered 79 million vaccine doses, making it the largest donor to Pakistan. We appreciate that the US has also provided \$80 million to beat the coronavirus and build capacity for disease surveillance. Despite COVID-19 and other fluctuations, the US remains the largest export market for Pakistan. In 2021-22, our trade increased from \$8.4 billion to \$12 billion. Pakistan's exports went up from \$7 billion to \$9 billion, of which IT exports were \$1 billion. The US conglomerates and multinational corporations have been doing good business in Pakistan for decades. These include top brands like Proctor and Gamble, Abbot, Cargill, Coca-Cola, and Pepsi, to name a few, and invest in energy, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, communications and consumer goods. Altogether eighty American enterprises give jobs to nearly 150,000 people and sustain more than a million households.

In terms of climate change, the stark reality is that Pakistan emits less than 0.4 percent of global greenhouse gasses and yet it is the eighth most vulnerable country to climate change. Pakistan welcomes the US recent initiative announced by Ambassador Donald Blome in Islamabad to launch a Green Alliance. High-level visits and communication have given a fresh impetus to our endeavours to recalibrate, reenergize, and rejuvenate a broad-based relationship. It would be a practical, pragmatic, and realistic correlative without a mismatch of expectations and attendant disappointments.

In terms of public sentiments, firstly, as Pakistanis we do feel that the US being a long-time friend of Pakistan seldom acknowledged our contribution (financial and human loss) to the War on Terror. Pakistani people are fully aware of the credibility of world superpower statements. Hence acknowledging the Pakistan government and its people's contribution in the War on Terror would have added strength to Pakistan's stance on eradicating the militancy in the region and beyond. Secondly, the US should not expect Pakistan but remain assured that Pakistan has always remained a

loyal partner of the US and its military capabilities do not pose any threat to the US or its allies or partners. Thirdly, the people of Pakistan expected the support of the US government in easing the IMF conditions during the program period. Leading economists of the country believe that the last and current IMF program is the harshest ever given to any developing country such as Pakistan. People of Pakistan also expect a long-time cordial friend to help Pakistan in the worst financial time in the history of Pakistan. Standing by Pakistan during the IMF program would have set a clear precedent for struggling economies to count on the world's most powerful country like the United States in times of crisis!

The writer is Assistant Professor at National University of Science and Technology (NUST)

Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Cooperation & Dialogue

Gul Dad & Raja Wajahat Ahmed

In the year 2023, Pakistan actively participated in engagements with various world organizations and global powers as part of its commitment to eradicating terrorism worldwide. Through several bilateral dialogues conducted throughout the year, Pakistan engaged in discussions focusing on the global political scenario, particularly addressing issues related to counter-terrorism efforts. These dialogues aimed to foster collaboration and coordination with world organizations and influential nations to collectively combat and eliminate terrorism on a global scale. Pakistan's engagements involved discussions on strategies, initiatives, and joint actions needed to address the evolving challenges posed by terrorism and extremism across international borders.

Counter Terrorism Dialogue with the EU

In April 2023, the Counter Terrorism Dialogue between the European Union and Pakistan, held in Brussels, had a significant focus on bolstering efforts against terrorism. Forming part of the broader 2019 Strategic Engagement Plan, both sides strongly condemned terrorism and pledged collaborative action. Discussions encompassed strategies to prevent extremism, tackle both online and offline radicalization, and disrupt terrorism financing. The dialogue highlighted cooperation in global forums such as the UN and shared concerns about the security implications arising from the situation in Afghanistan. A primary objective was identifying practical ways to aid Pakistan in countering evolving terrorism threats, emphasizing the importance of concrete support. Overall, the dialogue underscored the necessity of international cooperation in combating terrorism, emphasizing the backing for Pakistan's anti-terrorism initiatives.

Since the countries falling in the EU block did not recognize the interim Taliban government in Afghanistan, the EU countries are facing serious challenge to engage with the new government in Kabul and deal with possible challenges emerging from possible instability in the war-torn country that may lead to influx of people to the European destinations.

Pakistan-US Counterterrorism Dialogue and Cooperation

In March 2023, Pakistan-US Counter-Terrorism Dialogue was held in Islamabad. The dialogue provided a platform to discuss Pakistan's counterterrorism landscape and the broader regional context, focusing on areas where collaboration between the United States and Pakistan could be strengthened to counteract regional and global threats. Priority areas included enhancing cooperation, preventing violent extremism, and disrupting terrorism financing. Both governments committed to intensifying discussions and exploring avenues to initiate or reinstate counterterrorism programs, thereby supporting Pakistan's efforts against all forms of violent extremism. Since US

withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US scaled down its counter-terrorism cooperation and intelligence sharing with Pakistan. Now the US is more interested to keep its engagement and cooperation limited to increasing capacity of the Pakistan's counter-terrorism apparatus, capacity building in prosecution and addressing the issue of terror financing. Lately, in November, US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome announced \$8.25 million to boost law enforcement in Balochistan. The funds will expand the Anti-Terrorist Force training facility, repair ten flood-damaged police stations, construct new stations prioritizing service improvement, and provide equipment. This signals a shift in the US approach from short-term counterterrorism cooperation to a more sustained strategy in Pakistan.

China-Pakistan Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

While China and Pakistan are strategic partners, both the countries expanded their security and counter-terrorism cooperation while continuing economic cooperation and expanding cooperation under China-Pakistan-Economic Corridor. Counter-Terrorism remains one of the key elements of bilateral consultations at the civil and military levels. While majority of discussions remain away from media's reach, the bilateral visits and engagement might shed some light. In April 2023, Army Chief General Asim Munir paid a four-day official visit to China where security and counter-terrorism were important discussing points. Similarly, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamshad Mirza paid a five-day official visit to China in June 2023 as head of delegation for Pakistan-China Defence and Security Talks. In May, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang visited Pakistan and co-chaired the 4th round of the Foreign Minister-level Pakistan-China Strategic Dialogue in Islamabad along with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Zardari. Security and Counter-terrorism remained one of the agenda items during bilateral dialogue. During caretaker Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar's visit to China to attend to the Third Belt and Road Forum 2023 discussions also continued on security and counter-terrorism besides economic cooperation and consultation on regional and global issues. In the wake of growing threats to Chinese nationals in Pakistan, the military intelligence of China and Pakistan have reportedly setup a hotline for sharing CT related information.

Afghanistan-China-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue and CT Engagement

In May 2023, a trilateral dialogue at the level of foreign ministers between Afghanistan, China and Pakistan was held in Islamabad. Besides focusing on economic and political issues, this 5th round of trilateral dialogue also focused on security and counter-terrorism. The three sides underscored the need to tackle security challenges posing a serious threat to regional and global security, and directly impacting the stability and economic prosperity of the entire region. The three sides agreed to coordinate and cooperate on security, organized crimes, drugs smuggling etc. The three sides stressed on the need of not allowing any individual, group or party, including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) etc., to use their territories to harm and threaten regional security and interests, or conduct terrorist actions and activities.

It is believed that China is also pushing Afghanistan to address Pakistan's counter-terrorism concerns especially the issue of TTP as growing threats in Pakistan also hamper Chinese projects and investment under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Pakistan-China-Iran Trilateral Consultation on Counter Terrorism and Security

In June 2023, China, Iran, and Pakistan held their first trilateral counterterrorism and regional security consultations in Beijing, discussing the regional security situation and the threat of terrorism. The Pakistani and Chinese foreign ministries announced the decision to institutionalize and hold the meeting regularly. Senior Chinese, Pakistani, and Iranian counterterrorism officials led their teams at the dialogue. Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province is likely an essential agenda item, as it is

central to a multibillion-dollar Chinese-funded program, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The establishment of a trilateral security mechanism between China, Pakistan, and Iran reflects their shared concerns regarding security in Baluchistan. Baluch insurgents oppose CPEC, claiming it is helping Pakistan's efforts to deprive the local population of the region's natural resources and carrying out deadly attacks against Chinese nationals working on the projects. China and Pakistan reject these charges as baseless and maintain that the mega development project is bringing economic prosperity to the poverty-stricken province and Pakistan at large. Baluchistan abuts Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchistan province, where Iranian security forces are battling domestic Sunni-based militants blamed for deadly attacks in the predominantly Shiite Muslim country.

Pakistan-Russia Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism

The tenth session of the Pakistan-Russia Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism and Other Challenges to Security was held in Islamabad. Discussions between both sides extensively covered global and regional terrorist threats, specifically focusing on Afghanistan, Central and South Asia, and North Africa. The dialogue emphasized the intricate nature of the terrorism landscape, emphasizing the ongoing need for sustained vigilance. Pakistan and Russia outlined their individual national strategies and measures in combating terrorism during the discussions. They exchanged experiences and highlighted successful approaches, underlining the crucial role of each country's efforts in the broader fight against terrorism. This meeting was part of the routine exchanges within the framework of Pakistan-Russia bilateral counter-terrorism cooperation. Mutual agreement was reached to strengthen collaborative efforts, emphasizing the reciprocal benefits arising from such cooperation. Discussions centered on enhancing collaboration in multilateral forums like the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Both sides expressed their commitment to collaborating in countering terrorism financing and other essential aspects of counter-terrorism.

Various topics, including different forms of radicalization, the proliferation of terrorist ideologies, and the misuse of information and communication technologies for terrorist purposes, were discussed. Consensus was reached on the necessity for comprehensive strategies to effectively address these challenges.

Gul Dad is Director Research at PICSS

Raja Wajahat Ahmed is Research Assistant at PICSS

Pakistan's Joint Military Exercises

Wajahat Satti

In 2023, Pakistan conducted various military exercises with allied nations and global partners, aiming to significantly elevate its military capabilities. These exercises were strategically designed to not only enhance Pakistan's proficiency in counterterrorism strategies but also to equip its forces with valuable experience in handling complex and challenging scenarios. Such joint exercises often serve as critical platforms for skill enhancement and the exchange of expertise between partnering nations.

Aman 2023

The ninth edition of Pakistan's "Aman" international naval exercise in February 2023 involved 50 nations, signifying a significant collaboration in maritime security. Hosted biennially by the Pakistan Navy in the Arabian Sea, the exercise aimed at joint maneuvers, anti-piracy operations, and naval training. It served as a platform for nations to exchange expertise and enhance maritime capabilities. Beyond military drills, it showcased Pakistan's commitment to regional stability and diplomatic ties.

The exercise comprised two phases: the Harbor Phase for non-tactical activities and the Sea Phase for tactical maneuvers, fostering mutual learning and operational coordination among participating navies. The naval exercises conducted by the Pakistan Navy in the Arabian Sea highlighted Pakistan's commitment to bolstering its maritime capabilities. This collaboration not only signifies Pakistan's dedication to enhancing its naval strength but also serves as a testament to its emphasis on fostering international cooperation in the maritime domain. These military exercises showcase Pakistan's strategic efforts to fortify its military prowess through collaborations and joint initiatives with various countries, underlining its commitment to strengthening its defense capabilities and fostering alliances with global partners.

ATATURK-XII 2023

The two-week long joint military exercise, ATATURK-XII 2023, held at Tarbela in last week of January 2023 between the Pakistani Special Service Group (SSG) and Turkish Special Forces, focused on bolstering their collaboration in countering terrorism. Over a span of two weeks, this drill concentrated on various vital elements such as combat medic training, sniper operations, improvised explosive device (IED) handling, and the clearance of compounds and caves.

This exercise served as a platform for both countries to strengthen their military cooperation, facilitating the exchange of expertise and strategies essential for combating terrorism. By participating in the Ataturk series' 12th iteration, Islamabad and Ankara showcased their continued commitment to enhancing joint operational capabilities and fostering a deeper partnership between their armed forces.

Shaheen X

The Shaheen X joint air training exercise, held in Jaquan and Yinchuan in September 2023, China, brought together the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF). This exercise featured the participation of both air and ground crews, showcasing advanced fighter aircraft like the JF-17 and J-10. Established in 2011, the Shaheen exercises are conducted in turns by the PLAAF and PAF. These exercises aim to enhance operational readiness, refine aerial combat techniques, improve interoperability, and strengthen the synergy between the longstanding strategic allies in the region. Additionally, the incorporation of elements related to cyberspace, computers, and hybrid warfare into these air exercises aims to bolster the effectiveness of the Pakistan Air Force in the rapidly evolving landscape of modern warfare. The primary objective of this exercise was to fortify the defense capabilities of both Pakistan and China against common threats, fostering the development of a unified defense strategy. As the ninth joint aerial exercise between the esteemed PAF and PLAAF, Shaheen X signifies a concerted effort to reinforce the bonds of unity and friendship between the air forces of both nations.

Eternal Brotherhood-II

The Multinational Joint Special Forces Exercise, Eternal Brotherhood-II, brought together Special Forces units from Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Qatar, Turkey, and Uzbekistan in Barotha for two weeks in September 2023. This exercise aimed to combat terrorism and build rapport among participating nations. Beyond refining tactical skills, it showcased professionalism and historic military-to-military connections. Eternal Brotherhood-II focused on joint approaches against terrorism, highlighting shared interests and future collaborations. It emphasized collective dedication to global peace. The exercise's success underscores the importance of international cooperation in countering terrorism and strengthening bonds among participating nations for enhanced global security.

AL BATTAR-I

The joint special forces exercise "AL BATTAR-I" was held between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in Cherat, Pakistan. The exercise commenced on 22 August 2023 with participation of Special Forces contingents from two brotherly countries signifies a significant milestone in their military cooperation. It involves both countries' special forces aiming to strengthen enduring military relations and establish a unified approach to military operations while identifying future collaboration opportunities. This exercise leverages their collective expertise in combating terrorism, fostering bilateral relations, and exchanging military strategies to enhance their counter-terrorism efforts. Ultimately, it plays a crucial role in deepening mutual understanding and strengthening existing bonds between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Multinational Joint Counter-Terrorism Exercise Fajar Al Sharq-V

In November, the National Counter Terrorism Centre in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's Pabbi hosted a two-week long multinational joint counter-terrorism exercise Fajar Al Sharq-V. According to Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), contingents of special forces from the brotherly countries participated in the exercise. Fajar Al Sharq-V is a multinational joint exercise in the counter-terrorism domain among the special forces of Pakistan, Bahrain, Iraq and Kuwait. The ISPR said that the exercise is aimed at nurturing joint employment and interoperability besides, harnessing the historic military-to-military relations among the brotherly countries.

The writer is a Research Assistant at PICSS

DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

SOURCES:

Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) collects information from all available sources and tries to record in its digital online database (PICSS Militancy Database) each and every violent incident available from reliable and quotable sources. The following sources of information are used to collect data:

1. Open Sources e.g. newspapers (including local and national); TV channels; news websites; Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR); government websites; and militant websites, forums and their social media accounts, etc.
2. Government offices, e.g. ministry of interior, police, ministry of health
3. Own correspondents: We have our own network of two types of correspondents
4. PICSS own correspondents in Khyber Pakhtunkwa, FATA and Balochistan.



METHODS:

PICSS corroborates every incident from as many sources as possible to make sure the information recorded in the database is correct to best possibilities. Database is continuously reviewed and updated. Incidents are recorded mainly in two categories.



- Violent militant attacks.
- Militant Attacks against the government, public, or private targets. These targets can be against life or property e.g. government installations such as gas pipelines, electricity transmission lines, etc.
- Militant clashes among different militant groups
- Security Forces Actions
- Violent responses in which arms/weapons are used
- Non-violent responses such as arrests without using/firing weapons and defusing bombs etc.

FOCUS:

PICSS is focused only on anti-state violence and related response. Sectarian violence, general crimes, and ethnic or linguistic-based violence are not recorded. However, there is overlapping related to actions of certain sectarian groups who were previously involved only in sectarian violence but now have nexus with anti-state armed groups thus, the PICSS tries to record those violent incidents of such groups which have a connection of anti-state intentions. Sectarian violence has different dynamics and requires separate analysis. Different factors are kept in view while deciding whether an incident is anti-state or not. The following factors are taken into account while categorizing whether an incident is anti-state or otherwise:-

TARGETS:

- Generally, the target of violent militant attacks helps to define the nature of the attack. Activities in which government installations are targeted are considered anti-state.
- Attacks against on-duty uniformed personnel of security forces are recorded as anti-state
- Attacks against a group of government officials where circumstances show that target was not an individual official but government functioning was targeted are also recorded as anti-state.
- Attacks against individual officials whether in uniform or part of civil government are evaluated from different aspects. Only being a member of the government or military is not enough to determine whether the aim was to target the state or it was due to personal enmity. In such cases perpetrators and other circumstances are used to determine the nature of the attack.

PERPETRATORS

- If an activity perpetrated by known militant groups fighting against the state such as Al-Qaeda, TTP, BLA, etc. is recorded as anti-state activity.
- In case a sectarian militant group perpetrates a violent act then it is determined by the nature of the target. If the target was of sectarian nature only then it is not recorded in the anti-state database.
- If the perpetrator is not known then the nature of the target is used to determine the nature of the incident.

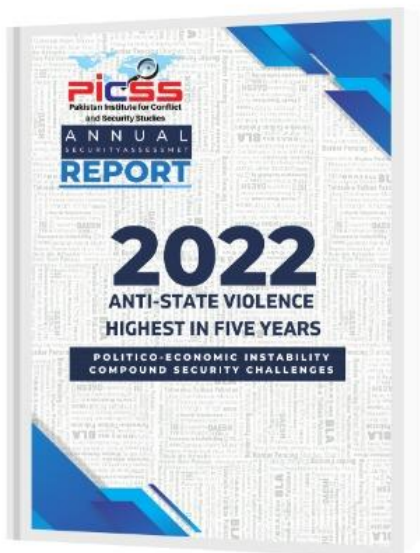
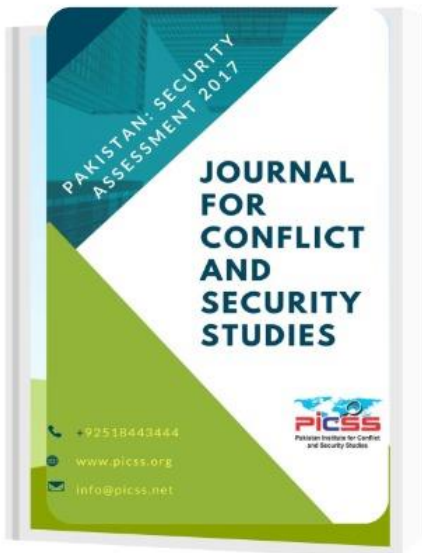
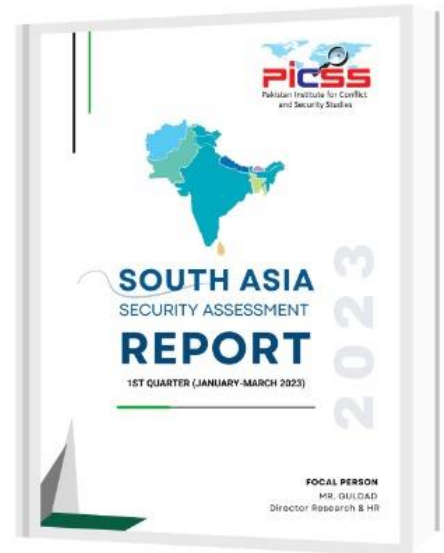
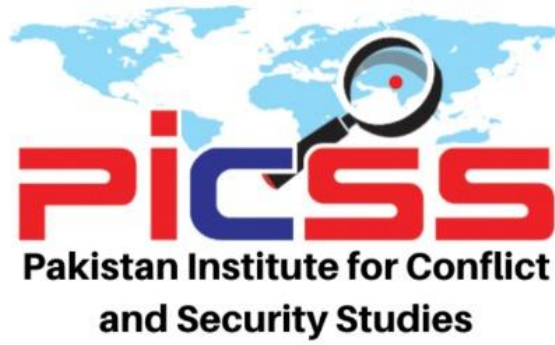
CIRCUMSTANCES

At times, target of the violent activity and perpetrator both remain unclear then nature of the incident is determined based on the circumstances of the incidents. E.g. A blast occurs at a place where no one is targeted and apparently it is not known who carried out the blast. There are possibilities that militants were transporting some explosives which could detonate erroneously. This will be anti-state activity. However, it is also possible that criminals other than militants were transporting the explosives and it got detonated. In such cases police investigations and different dimensions of the incident are kept in view to determine the exact nature of the incident. This type of situation arises rarely during the data collection operations thus, it is least likely that an error can influence overall pattern of violence.



NO DOUBTFUL ENTRY

PICSS researchers use this principle while recording violent incidents “when there is a doubt, cut it out”. Only those incidents are recorded in the database where PICSS has no doubt about the nature of the incident.



Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies



House No. 107, Street No.49, F-11/3 Islamabad ,Pakistan



info@picss.net



www.picss.net



051-8443444