Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies

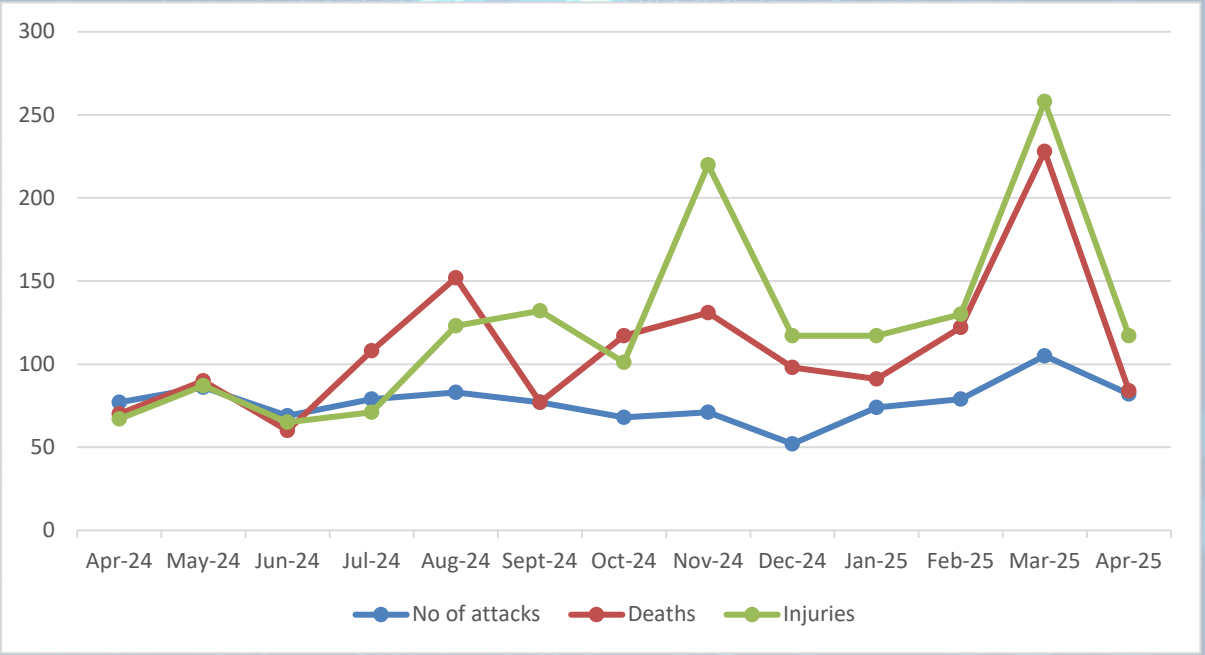
MONTHLY INSIGHT

Security, Socio-Economics and Political Trends

APRIL 2025

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- **Notable Reduction in Violence in Pakistan; Heightened Security Forces Actions**
- **'Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen Pakistan': New Militant Alliance Challenges TTP's Monopoly**
- **TTP Seeks Expanding Ideological/ Operational Presence in Punjab; Sindh**
- **Discord in Dialogue: PTI's Dilemma or Calculated Move?**
- **Extremist Violence and Mob Attacks in Pakistan: Alarming Trends and State Response**
- **Canals Issue and Cenrte-Sindh Rift: Water Policy Needed**
- **Indo-Pak Crisis: will the Sanity Prevail?**
- **Pakistan's Engagement with the US, Russia on CT**
- **Cross-Border Tensions After Killing of Pakistani Workers in Iran**
- **Renewed Pakistan-Bangladesh Diplomatic Engagement Amid Historic Irritants**
- **Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Security Concerns and Diplomatic Re-engagement**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan's internal security situation improved significantly in April, marked by a sharp decline in militant attacks, casualties, and a notable increase in successful counterterrorism operations. Nationwide militant attacks fell by 22% compared to March, while fatalities and injuries dropped by 63% and 55%, respectively, with militants accounting for over 70% of total deaths—mainly due to intensified military operations, including a major two-phase offensive near the Afghan border that killed 71 TTP fighters. Civilian and security force casualties remained low, reflecting enhanced operational precision and intelligence-led action. Although the tribal districts saw a spike in militant deaths and targeted killings of local peace committee members, areas like Balochistan and Punjab recorded substantial reductions in violence despite attempts of TTP to expand its reach. KP's mainland and tribal belt experienced fewer attacks and casualties overall, despite localized upticks in militant targeting. Sindh and Punjab remained relatively quiet, with only low-scale incidents and minor casualties, while Islamabad, AJK, and GB reported no attacks.

The militant landscape in Pakistan saw a significant shift with the formation of a new alliance, *Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen Pakistan (IMP)*—comprising Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, Lashkar-e-Islam, and Harkat Inqilab-e-Islami Pakistan—challenging the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) dominance by launching coordinated attacks and consolidating operations under a unified front. This has sparked a defensive ideological response from the TTP, which emphasized unity and centralized jihad through renewed propaganda, while also expanding its influence beyond traditional bases. The TTP issued veiled threats in South Punjab following local resistance, marked by the release of Punjabi-language content to appeal to regional sentiments, and launched a Sindhi-language propaganda platform, signaling its strategy to position itself as a nationwide Islamic movement. These developments raise concerns over increased violence, inter-group competition, and the spread of militancy into previously less-affected areas, posing complex challenges for Pakistan's internal security and counterterrorism strategies.

Internal divisions within Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) became evident after senior leader Azam Swati revealed unauthorized outreach to the military establishment, sparking questions about PTI's strategy amid Imran Khan's incarceration. While the party distanced itself publicly, its tepid response and leadership ambiguity suggested a dual-track approach—balancing populist anti-establishment rhetoric with pragmatic overtures. Notably, a political and inter-provincial crisis erupted over the federal government's canal project linked to Cholistan, leading to PPP-led Sindh's strong opposition and mass protests. The issue strained coalition ties between PPP and PML-N, revealing governance tensions and the need for a unified national water policy. The matter was defused after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif agreed to halt the project pending provincial consensus via the Council of Common Interests. In the meanwhile, a spike in extremist violence—particularly TLP-linked attacks on international businesses and minorities under the pretext of pro-Palestinian sentiment—highlighted Pakistan's deepening religious radicalization and the state's weak, inconsistent response. The lynching of an Ahmadi community member in Karachi and over 20 violent incidents against Western food outlets underscored the urgent need for firm legal and ideological countermeasures. On economic front, some positive signs were witnessed though

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pressures remain and the evolving crisis in South Asia might seriously impact economic outlook.

India-Pakistan tensions have escalated sharply following a deadly attack in Pahalgam, with India blaming Pakistan-backed militants and taking a series of retaliatory measures against Pakistan, including suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, downgrading diplomatic ties, and banning Pakistani overflights. Pakistan strongly rejected the allegations, sought independent investigation, and warned that any action from India would be met with force, while also accusing India of sponsoring terrorism within Pakistan. While India has so far desisted of taking any military action, its chances remain high making the situation increasingly volatile.

In April, Pakistan actively pursued diplomatic engagements with key international partners, signaling a strategic push to strengthen its global ties amid evolving regional challenges. High-level meetings with a visiting U.S. congressional delegation focused on counterterrorism, defense cooperation, and trade, setting the stage for a future security dialogue in June. Tensions with Iran flared after the killing of eight Pakistani workers in Sistan-Baluchestan, prompting calls for enhanced bilateral coordination against cross-border militancy. Simultaneously, Pakistan and Russia reaffirmed counterterrorism cooperation during their 11th working group meeting, expressing shared concerns about Afghanistan. In a historic thaw, Pakistan and Bangladesh resumed formal diplomatic talks after 15 years, addressing longstanding issues while exploring avenues for economic and cultural collaboration. Meanwhile, the UAE foreign minister's visit advanced economic ties through new investment agreements and institutional frameworks, reinforcing a strategic partnership that spans trade, energy, and security. PM Shahbaz Sharif also visited Belarus while Foreign Ministers of Rwanda and Hungary visited Pakistan.

In April, Afghanistan experienced a turbulent convergence of domestic strain, regional tension, and expanding international engagement under the Taliban regime. Domestically, the Taliban drew widespread criticism for controversial financial decisions—most notably the allocation of $9 million to Pakistani religious seminaries—while implementing sweeping institutional downsizing and halting pension payments, triggering protests and amplifying public discontent. The economic crisis was deepened by reduced international aid, particularly from the U.S., compounding the humanitarian emergency as over 22.9 million Afghans face severe poverty and malnutrition. Meanwhile, relations with Pakistan remained strained, dominated by Islamabad's accusations of Afghan-based militant activity and the aggressive deportation of Afghan refugees. Despite these tensions, diplomatic outreach resumed, with high-level visits and proposed joint mechanisms to manage trade and repatriation issues. Internationally, Russia suspended the Taliban's terrorist designation, signaling readiness for deeper engagement, while China, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and India shown interests in expanding trade and infrastructure cooperation. These developments underscore the Taliban's mounting internal challenges and fragile attempts to gain international legitimacy, amid worsening socio-economic conditions and unresolved regional security concerns.

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1 SECURITY SITUATION IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan witnessed a significant improvement in its internal security landscape in April as both militant attacks and resultant casualties dropped sharply compared to March. The number of militant attacks fell by 22 percent—from 105 in March to 82 in April—while fatalities and injuries declined by 63 percent and 55 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, security forces intensified their counterterrorism actions, killing at least 203 militants in various operations—making militants the overwhelming majority (73%) of total fatalities in April. Only two civilians and two security personnel were killed in these operations. Overall, a total of 287 people were killed in April in both militant attacks and security forces actions, down from 335 in March. Similarly, injuries dropped from 271 to 117. Most notably, the share of militant deaths rose dramatically, accounting for 203 out of 287 total fatalities—over 70 percent. Civilian and security force casualties remained minimal, with 30 and 32 fatalities, respectively.

April also marked the lowest monthly death toll among security forces since June 2024, while civilian deaths also dropped significantly—underscoring improved operational precision and threat containment. Improvements in proactive intelligence-led operations and enhanced border vigilance were the key factors. The most consequential development of the month was a two-phase military operation near the Pak-Afghan border that targeted a large group of infiltrating Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants. At least 71 militants were killed—making it the biggest loss suffered by the group in a single operation to date. Intelligence assessments suggest that the TTP attempted mass infiltration, miscalculating that Pakistani forces might be distracted by heightened tensions along the eastern border with India.

A disturbing trend was the targeted killing of 13 members of local peace committees (razakars)—a community-based defense initiative that has historically resisted militant infiltration. The resurgence of attacks on these volunteers, particularly in the tribal districts, suggests that groups like the TTP are attempting to reassert dominance by silencing local resistance structures.

Mainland KP recorded 37 militant attacks in April—marginally down from 42 in March. However, fatalities from militant attacks and security forces' actions combined declined from 124 in March to 65 in April—a 48% reduction. Civilian deaths fell from 32 to 10, while security forces' fatalities dropped from 30 to 8. Injuries also decreased from 65 to 34.

The tribal districts of KP – erstwhile FATA – reported 17 attacks in April, slightly down from 18 in March. 24 people were killed and 49 others were injured. However, total fatalities from militant attacks and security forces' actions combined increased significantly from 82 to 136—a 66% increase—driven by a sharp rise in militant deaths from 61 to 116. Security forces' deaths declined from 19 to 7. Injuries rose slightly from 50 to 55. The killing of 12 razakars, up from none in March, indicates a shift in militant targeting patterns.

Balochistan witnessed 21 militant attacks in April, compared to 35 in March—a 40% decline. 31 people including 16 security forces personnel, 12 civilians and three militants were killed and while 32 others including 24 security forces personnel and eight civilians were

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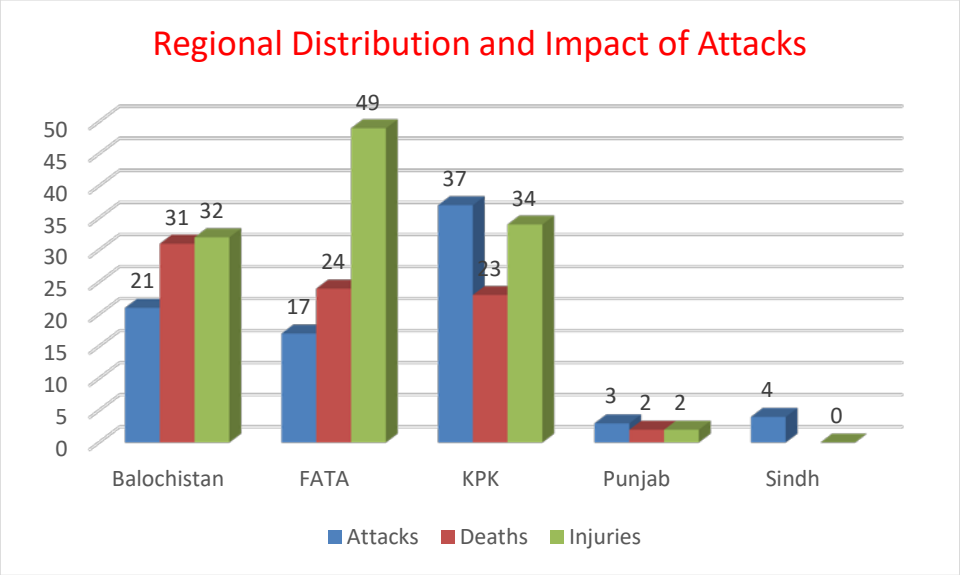
injured. Combined fatalities from militant attacks and security forces' actions dropped from 122 to 59—a 52% reduction. Civilian deaths declined from 45 to 29, while security forces' deaths fell from 37 to 16. Injuries also decreased from 148 to 32—a 78% drop.



Punjab recorded three attacks in April, down from seven in March—a 57% decrease. Two people were killed (both the militants) and two security forces personnel were injured beside kidnapping of four persons. In security forces action and militant attacks combined, total deaths increased from six to twelve, all of whom were militants. similarly, injuries rose from one to seven. TTP's efforts to expand its footprint continued in Dera Ghazi Khan and Taunsa Sharif, where the group reportedly directed local farmers to pay usher (Islamic tax on crops) to its representatives. The group is also trying to make inroads in Punjab and Sindh at operational and ideological levels (read more on this in later part of this report).

Sindh experienced four attacks in April—up from three in March—but the overall impact remained limited. Fatalities rose slightly from one to four, all low-scale incidents. Injuries dropped from seven to none. No major claims were made by of the group, marking a quieter month in urban Sindh. However, political unrest and agitation was witnessed across the province over canal project. Meanwhile, security forces arrested four suspected militants in the province.

The federal capital remained peaceful in April, with no militant attacks reported for the second consecutive month. However, one preemptive counterterror operation led to the arrest of a suspected militant. No militant attacks were reported from Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan in April.

Table 1: Province wise breakup of Militant Attacks (April 2025)

Region	Incidents	Killed					Injured					Kdnp	
		SFP	PGR	M	C	Total	SFP	PGR	M	C	Total		
KPK	37	8	1	4	10	23	18	2	2	12	34	0	4
Balochistan	21	16	0	3	12	31	24	0	0	8	32	0	1
FATA	17	5	12	4	3	24	15	18	1	15	49	0	0
Sindh	4	1	0	0	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Punjab	3	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	4
Total	**82**	**30**	**13**	**13**	**28**	**84**	**59**	**20**	**3**	**35**	**117**	**0**	**9**

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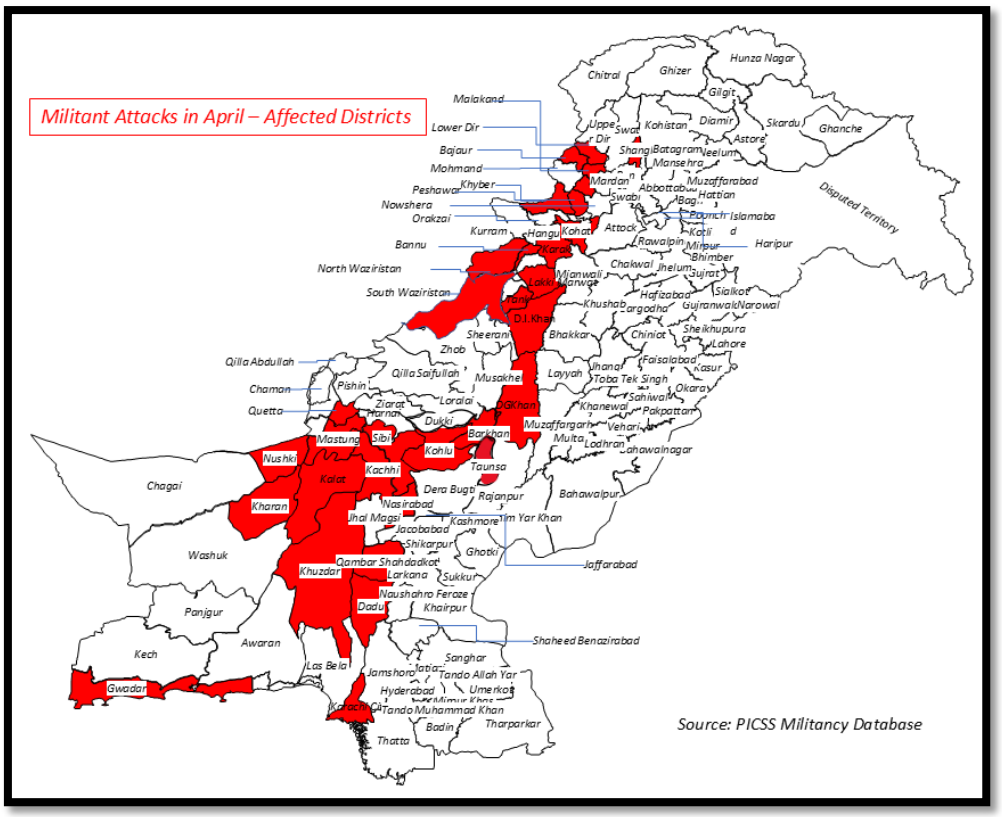
As shown in the map, violence in Pakistan was once again concentrated in areas falling in the south-western and north-western regions of Pakistan, with Balochistan, erstwhile FATA, and southern as well as central KP emerging as the most affected areas. TTP has intensified its efforts expand its activities not only in southern KP but also making further efforts to expand its reach into adjoining districts of Punjab showing presence and activities in DG Khan and Taunsa Sharif districts and thus creating a sort of corridor from north to south stretching into Balochsitan's mainly Pashtun belt. In Balochistan, violence was witnessed mostly in central districts besides attacks in Quetta and coastal Gwadar district. Some troubles in Qamar-Shahdad Kot and Dadu districts, which are lying next to troubled Balochistan's areas, indicate that Baloch militant groups are apparently expanding their reach besides possible attempt of identifying spaces in adjoining areas falling under Sindh province to avoid expected hardening of noose by the security forces.



1.1 Types of Militant Attacks and their Comparison

Tactical Assaults (TA) remained the most frequent mode of attack in April, though they declined from 40 in March to 29 such incidents in April. Fatalities caused by TA also decreased from 42 to 28, and the number of injured dropped from 39 to 32. Despite being the most used tactic, the lethality of TA attacks appeared to diminish, suggesting improved countermeasures.

Targeted Killings (TK) also decreased in frequency and intensity. The number of incidents fell from 26 in March to 20 in April, and the resulting deaths dropped from 40 to 23. Most of the victims were civilians, reinforcing the notion that targeted assassinations remain a favored tool for militants to spread fear and eliminate specific adversaries, albeit on a reduced scale this month.

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IED-based attacks remained steady in volume—19 in April compared to 18 in March. Fatalities from IEDs decreased slightly from 32 to 27, while injuries increased from 66 to 73 when compared with the previous month. A notable aspect of IED-based attacks was specifically targeting members of peace committees.

Kidnappings (K) increased in frequency, rising from two in March to seven in April. Grenade Attacks (GrA) and Mortar Attacks (MrA) remained limited but steady. Grenade attacks stood at 5 incidents (same as March), causing 2 deaths and 2 injuries. MrA occurred twice, resulting in 2 deaths and 6 injuries.

Notably, April saw no Vehicle-Borne IEDs (VBIEDs) or combined Suicide + Tactical Assault (SA+TA) attacks, which had caused mass casualties in March. In fact, no suicide of any type was reported in April.

Table 2: Types of Militant Attacks in Pakistan in April 2025

Type	Incidents	Killed					Injured					Kdnp
		SFP	PGR	M	C	Total	SFP	PGR	M	C	Total	
TA	29	12	1	11	4	28	24	2	3	3	32	2
TK	20	7	0	0	16	23	1	0	0	3	4	0
IED	19	9	12	0	6	27	32	18	0	23	73	0
K	7	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	7
GrA	5	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	2	2	0
MrA	2	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	4	6	0
Total	**82**	**30**	**13**	**13**	**28**	**84**	**59**	**20**	**3**	**35**	**117**	**9**

1.2 Security Forces Actions/ Operations – April 2025

Security forces significantly ramped up their operations in April 2025, conducting 52 notable actions, a 67.7% increase compared to 31 operations in March. These operations led to a sharp escalation in militant fatalities and a broader geographic spread of counter-militancy activities. In terms of lethality, 194 individuals were killed in April, compared to 107 in March, marking an 81.3% increase in deaths. Of these, 190 were militants, representing a 128.9% increase from March's 83 militant deaths. Security forces personnel (SFP) casualties dropped considerably—from 13 deaths in March to only 2 in April—suggesting either better operational planning as well as increased use of intelligence-led precision strikes. Civilian deaths also decreased sharply from 11 to 2. Injuries also rose from 13 in March to 22 in April, with 20 militants and 2 civilians injured. No security personnel were reported injured in April, again indicating improved force protection measures. Arrests also increased from 31 in March to 50 in April, marking a 61% rise in detentions—highlighting a trend toward disrupting militant infrastructure through intelligence-based raids.

Erstwhile FATA emerged as the most active region in April, witnessing 10 operations that resulted in the highest militant death toll: 112 militants killed and 4 injured. This marks a drastic increase from March, where FATA saw 47 militant fatalities. Security forces also lost 2 personnel. Mainland KP also remained a major focus, with 20 operations (up from 15 in March). However, fatalities decreased —from 52 in March to 42 in April (all militants). Injuries

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increased from 9 to 11 militants wounded, and arrests remained low, with only 2 suspects detained.

Balochistan witnessed increase in security forces actions, rising from 4 to 10 operations. Militant fatalities rose from 6 in March to 26 in April, with 2 civilian deaths. However, there were no reported injuries or casualties among security personnel, implying largely one-sided engagements or pre-emptive strikes. Arrests remained minimal, at 2.

Punjab saw an increase in both operations (from 1 in March to 7 in April) and arrests, with 11 suspects apprehended. Unlike March, where 22 arrests were concentrated in Lahore alone, April's data suggests broader engagement across the province. Moreover, 10 militants were killed and 5 injured, indicating Punjab is witnessing more kinetic engagements beyond intelligence gathering. Sindh and ICT witnessed minor activity. Sindh recorded 4 arrests with no fatalities or injuries, while ICT saw one arrest.

April marked a decisive escalation in counterterrorism operations, characterized by higher operational tempo, significantly more militant fatalities, and an apparent shift toward more effective, lower-risk engagements for security forces. The regional distribution of actions shows a concentrated focus on FATA and KP, while increased activity in Punjab and Balochistan reflects a widening geographic scope of militancy—and the state's response to it. The substantial drop in security forces' and civilian casualties, despite the rise in operations, underscores improved coordination, better intelligence, and possibly the use of more precise force.

Table 3: Province wise breakup of Security Forces Actions (April 2025)

Region	Incidents	Killed					Injured					Arrested
		SFP	PGR	M	C	Total	SFP	PGR	M	C	Total	
KP	20	0	0	42	0	42	0	0	11	0	11	2
Balochistan	10	0	0	26	2	28	0	0	0	0	0	2
FATA	10	2	0	112	0	114	0	0	4	2	6	0
Punjab	7	0	0	10	0	10	0	0	5	0	5	11
Sindh	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
ICT	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	**52**	**2**	**0**	**190**	**2**	**194**	**0**	**0**	**20**	**2**	**22**	**20**

1.3 Security Under Renewed Focus: Civilian Side Showing Spine

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chaired a crucial meeting on April 18, 2025, to review Pakistan's law and order situation and evaluate ongoing counterterrorism efforts. He emphasized that Pakistan's enemies fear its economic progress and praised the collective efforts of all state institutions and provincial governments in combating terrorism. Stressing the need for unity, he urged all political actors to set aside differences and work together to eliminate terrorism. He further directed relevant authorities to intensify crackdowns on smuggling and human trafficking, with a focus on dismantling the networks involved. Moreover, he called for the fast-tracking of Safe City projects in key urban centers—Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Gwadar—to strengthen surveillance and security infrastructure.

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The meeting also reviewed progress on the National and Provincial Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Centers established under NACTA and discussed measures for removing illegal constructions around major cities, with coordinated actions being taken by both federal and provincial governments. The Prime Minister reiterated the importance of completing the Gwadar Safe City project and establishing digital enforcement checkpoints along major highways to curb smuggling. The meeting was attended by key federal ministers, the Prime Minister's Advisor for Inter-Provincial Coordination, and representatives from all provinces, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Participants were briefed on ongoing security initiatives and efforts to enhance Pakistan's overall security framework.

The meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reflects a significant shift in the civilian leadership's assertiveness and its intent to take the lead on internal security and governance. This comes notably after Army Chief General Asim Munir's call for improved governance during the recent National Security Committee session in Parliament. The civilian side is now demonstrating greater resolve, taking concrete steps such as accelerating Safe City projects and clamping down on smuggling and trafficking—areas that traditionally relied on military or inter-agency leadership. This proactive approach suggests a deliberate strengthening of civilian institutions and their capacity to lead on national security matters in coordination with other agencies. The move indicates a maturing political will to share and assert responsibility for internal stability, challenging the conventional notion that the military alone must shoulder the burden of national security.

1.4 Security Situation in Balochistan

In April 2025, the security situation in Balochistan witnessed a relative decline in the number and lethality of militant attacks compared to March, yet it remained precarious and volatile. A total of 21 militant incidents were reported across the province, resulting in 31 fatalities and 32 injuries. This marks a sharp reduction from the previous month, which saw 35 attacks and 116 deaths, suggesting a temporary lull in militant attacks or a possible disruption of planned attacks by intensified security measures. Nevertheless, security forces continued to face substantial risks, accounting for over half of the fatalities (16 out of 31), followed by 12 civilian deaths and three militant fatalities. Injuries were also mainly sustained by security personnel, with 24 out of the 32 injured being members of law enforcement, underscoring their continued vulnerability.

District-wise data reveals a shift in the geographic pattern of violence. Quetta, the provincial capital, once again emerged as a focal point with five attacks causing eight deaths—including seven security personnel—and six injuries. The city remains a high-value target due to its administrative and symbolic significance. Mastung reported a major incident involving heavy casualties among security personnel, with five killed and 20 injured in just two attacks, indicating the presence of well-armed militant cells. Kalat witnessed six civilian fatalities and five injuries in three attacks, pointing to increased risks for non-combatants in central Balochistan.

Some districts such as Noshki and Gwadar saw targeted violence involving both militants and security personnel. In Noshki, two attacks led to five deaths, including three militants and two security personnel. In Gwadar, two security officials were killed and one civilian injured in a single incident, highlighting the threat to CPEC-related infrastructure and

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personnel. Barkhan and Kohlu each reported three civilian deaths, reflecting a continuation of ethnic or politically motivated killings seen in previous months.

Other districts such as Khuzdar, Kachhi, Kharan, Sibi, and Nasirabad remained relatively quiet, either experiencing isolated incidents or none at all. The only reported kidnapping occurred in Nasirabad, showing a considerable decline in abductions compared to the 11 cases reported in March. No arrests were recorded in April, which may suggest either a lack of actionable intelligence or a strategic focus on neutralizing threats rather than detentions.

Although April did not witness high-profile, mass-casualty events like March's hijacking of the Jaffar Express in Kachhi (Bolan), the persistent attacks targeting security forces demonstrate that militant networks remain operational and capable of inflicting significant harm. The relative drop in overall violence may reflect a temporary tactical retreat or a recalibration of militant strategy in response to heightened security operations. The distribution of violence across districts such as Quetta, Mastung, Kalat, and Gwadar suggests an enduring insurgent footprint with potential for resurgence.

While April saw a reduction in the scale of militant violence compared to the previous month, the sustained pattern of attacks—particularly those targeting security forces—signals that the province's security environment remains highly unstable. The temporary dip in large-scale attacks should not be misconstrued as an improvement in the long-term trajectory of peace in Balochistan, as insurgent groups may be regrouping for future offensives.

1.4.1 Notable Militant Attacks in Balochistan – April 2025

- **Quetta**: Three police personnel, including an inspector, were killed in an ambush on a mobile van in the Sariab area. A hand grenade attack on Kachi Baig police station injured a passerby. A suspected target killing claimed the life of hairdresser in Parkani Street. Four FC personnel were killed, and three injured, in an IED explosion at the Margot coal mines while clearing landmines—*BLA* claimed responsibility. A 7-year-old boy was injured in an IED explosion in Hazarganj while playing.
- **Mastung**: An IED-blast targeted a police bus on Dasht Road, killing three constables and injuring 20 others.Two Levies personnel guarding a polio team were killed in Teri. A roadside IED in Kapootu killed *Maulana Abdullah Nachari* (JUI-F leader) and two women, injuring five others.
- **Noshki District**: An FC soldier was shot dead in Qadirabad. Armed militants launched coordinated attacks on FC and Levies posts in Galangoor, killing one FC soldier. Four suicide vests were recovered from a garbage dump near the Deputy Commissioner's residence.
- **Gwadar District**: An IED explosion in Muskan Chowk (Pishin town) killed two security personnel and injured one civilian, spreading panic across Pasni.
- **Kalat District**: A retired police officer and a civilian were gunned down in Kalat city. In Kapootu, an IED attack (noted above) caused further casualties. Bodies of three unidentified individuals were recovered from Samand Khan Goji riverbed in Barkhan, with flags of a banned outfit.

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- **Kachhi, Sibi, and Kohlu Districts**: Hand grenade attacks occurred at police stations in Bhag (Kachhi) and Dhahar, and at a livestock office in Sibi. In Kohlu, *Shah Bakhsh* was killed after stepping on a landmine.
- **Nasirabad District**: A Hindu trader, *Sital Das*, was abducted in Mangoli area. Explosives were also found buried in White Choki, foiling a potential attack.

1.4.2 Notable Security Forces Actions in Balochistan – April 2025

- **Quetta**: Thje CTD foiled a large-scale terror plot on Sariab Road, recovering a 20kg IED, 50kg of explosives, five hand grenades, and firearms. In Derakhshan, CTD killed two militants, including a suicide bomber, during a raid—seizing jackets, weapons, and explosives.
- **Kech (Buleda & Turbat)**: In Buleda, two armed civilians were killed during an IBO. Though allegedly civilians, they were armed and ran when FC tried to stop them. Near Turbat, three militants involved in prior attacks were killed; weapons and ammo were seized.
- **Duki**: Security forces eliminated five suspected militants in the Bhabar Pahari mountains, dismantling hideouts meant for attacks in Duki and Ziarat.
- **Ziarat**: Seven militants were killed during an IBO in Choteer, conducted overnight based on intelligence. Militants used hand grenades during the two-hour firefight.
- **Noshki**: Security forces repelled coordinated attacks on FC and Levies posts, killing two militants in the Galangoor area. Security forces apprehended Farid Baloch, a key suspect in the Noshki blast and key commander of BLA's Majeed Brigade. Farid reportedly confessed to links with Indian operatives and that he was acting as a courier between RAW agents and BLA leadership
- **Nasirabad District**: Police uncovered a large cache of explosives in Dera Murad Jamali, potentially averting a major incident.

1.4.3 BNP-M Long March Ends without Targets Achieved

BNP-M chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal announced the end of his party's 20-day sit-in at Lakpass, Mastung, which had been launched in protest against the arrest of Baloch activists, including Mahrang Baloch, and declared that the movement would now shift toward a province-wide public outreach campaign. The BNP-M had begun a long march from Wadh to Quetta on March 28 but was obstructed by government, with supporters facing mass arrests and tear gas, and the party's planned advance to Quetta on April 6 was blocked by a heavy deployment of law enforcers. As talks with the government repeatedly failed, the BNP-M resorted to a shutter-down strike and road blockades that severely disrupted transport and commerce. Mengal also convened a multiparty conference that rejected the National Security Council's "hard-state" policy towards Balochistan. Meanwhile, the Balochistan High Court dismissed a constitutional petition seeking the release of Dr. Mahrang Baloch, chief organiser of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee, instead directing the petitioner to approach the provincial home department. The court did not rule on the legality of her detention under the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) law, effectively deflecting responsibility to the executive.

Although Mengal framed the shift from sit-in to public rallies as a tactical evolution of the movement, it remains unclear what triggered this sudden change of heart, particularly

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since the BNP-M had been adamant about continuing the protest until the release of Mahrang and other female activists. It is likely that the Balochistan High Court's refusal to provide legal relief, coupled with the government's unwavering stance against releasing Mahrang, left the party with no viable path forward. With legal channels closed and mounting pressure from logistical and political challenges on the ground, the BNP-M may have found itself pushed into a corner, compelling it to abandon the sit-in and reorient its efforts in a less confrontational form.

1.4.4 Detention of BYC Leader Dr. Mahrang Baloch Extended by One Month

The Balochistan government has extended the detention of Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) leader Dr. Mahrang Baloch and fellow activist Beebow Baloch by another 30 days under the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) Ordinance, citing threats to public safety. Dr. Baloch, arrested on March 22 and currently held in Quetta District Jail, faces over a dozen charges including terrorism, sedition, and murder. Despite legal efforts by her counsel and a High Court directive for further engagement with the Home Department, no formal application has yet been submitted for her release. The continued detention has triggered criticism from rights groups concerned about the suppression of political dissent, especially given BYC's vocal stance on enforced disappearances and other rights concerns.

The decision to extend Dr. Mahrang Baloch's detention appears to be a calculated move by state authorities aimed at pacifying the situation amid heightened political tensions and antagonistic public voices that are seen as particularly critical and challenging at this time. Her continued incarceration seems intended to avoid emboldening dissent and prevent the situation from escalating. This likely influenced the state's decision to halt the BNP-M's long march beyond Mastung, as authorities reportedly made background efforts to persuade Akhtar Mengal to call off the protest demanding her and other women's release. The approach signals an effort by the government to contain political unrest and manage narrative control, even if it risks further alienating nationalist segments.

1.5 Security Situation in Erstwhile FATA

In April 2025, the security situation in the erstwhile FATA (newly merged or tribal districts) remained precarious, with 17 militant attacks resulting in 24 fatalities and 49 injuries. While the number of attacks slightly declined from 18 in March to 17 in April, the lethality and geographic spread of incidents remained consistent, underscoring the persistent threat posed by militant groups, particularly the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliated factions. Moreover, a new alliance of three militant groups has also emerged (see more on IMP in later part of this report).

South Waziristan emerged as the most affected district, recording nine attacks that resulted in 20 deaths and 23 injuries. These incidents included tactical assaults and IED attacks targeting security convoys and checkpoints. The fatalities included two security forces personnel, four militants, and 14 civilians, marking a significant rise in civilian casualties in this region. Most injuries in South Waziristan were sustained by civilians, indicating that population centers and public infrastructure remain highly vulnerable to militant violence.

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Bajaur witnessed four attacks causing 21 injuries. Although there were no reported fatalities, the high number of wounded—especially among civilians and security personnel—highlighted the disruptive impact of these attacks on daily life and local mobility. In Khyber, three attacks led to three fatalities, including two security personnel and one civilian, while three others were injured. This indicates a continued militant focus on targeting law enforcement and state presence in the district.

North Waziristan, which was the most heavily affected district in March, saw a notable decrease in violence with only one attack reported in April, resulting in one death and two injuries. Khyber and Bajaur districts, however, continued to experience some form of militant activity.

1.5.1 Notable Militant Attacks in Erstwhile FATA – April 2025

- **South Waziristan**: *Sher Zaman*, a tribal elder, was abducted and killed in Ladda. Militants attacked homes of police in Toor Deb, Bero Kach, and Spin Tangi, abducting and later killing two constables while a young girl was also injured. In Kalosha, a TTP militant opened fire on SHO Alamgir Mehsud's team during a polio campaign; he later died. A IED exploded in *Rustam Bazaar, Wana*, killing 12 and injuring 18. Victims included peace committee members including *Saifur Rehman*. A child was killed and another injured when an IED exploded near an FC checkpost in *Azam Warsak*. In *Asman Manza*, a Frontier Corps subedar was shot dead by a sniper.
- **North Waziristan**: A convoy protecting an oil company was ambushed in *Shewa*, killing one soldier and injuring two others. A sniper attack near the border killed two soldiers during a counterterrorism operation. A deadly IED attack was launched near *Ghulam Khan Kallay* as part of cross-border infiltration attempts by TTP elements.
- **Bajaur**: An IED targeted an FC bomb disposal unit in *Lowi Mamund*, injuring eight.Militants attacked a police checkpoint in *Kashu*. Four personnel were injured in a militant assault on a joint FC-police post in *Mamund*. Four children were injured by a mortar shell in *Bara Laghari*.
- **Khyber**: Policeman *Alam Khan* was shot dead in *Shalobar*. A soldier was killed and another injured in a sniper attack in *Tirah Valley*. A landmine blast in *Sandapal* killed one civilian and injured two. Grenade and landmine incidents indicate continued threat from left-behind ordnance.

1.5.2 Notable Security Forces Actions in Erstwhile FATA – April 2025

1. **North Waziristan**: In a two-phase military operation**,** 71 TTP militants were killed—the group's biggest single-month loss. In Hassan Khel, a sanitization operation led to the killing of 17 militants, with arms and explosives recovered. An additional four militants were killed in another operation, though two soldiers also lost lives. In *Razmak*, five militants were neutralized in an intelligence-based operation.
2. **South Waziristan**: Key TTP ringleader *Zabiullah alias Zakran* was killed in *Badar*. In *Gomal Zam*, security forces killed three militants and recovered weapons. In another operation, local *Dottani tribesmen* repelled a militant attack on a police officer's home, killing three militants. Multiple proactive responses during IED recovery and threat mitigation efforts were observed across the district.

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3. **Bajaur**: Near the Afghan border, three TTP affiliates were killed in Mamund, including Fareedullah, son of Maulana Faqir Muhammad. The TTP Bajaur Chapter later confirmed these casualties in an audio statement.
4. **Khyber**: *Gunship helicopters* bombed militant hideouts in *Tirah Valley's Arhanga and Bhutan Shareef* areas. Airstrikes also targeted militant locations in *Jamrud's Maidanak*.

1.6 Security Situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)

In April 2025, the security landscape of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) remained volatile, with 37 reported militant attacks resulting in 23 fatalities and 34 injuries. Compared to March, the number of attacks declined from 42 to 37, and overall fatalities also dropped from 72 to 23. However, the persistent frequency of incidents and the wide geographic spread indicate that the militant threat remains active across both southern and central districts of the province.

The southern belt of KP, particularly Lakki Marwat and Bannu, remained the epicenter of militant activity. Lakki Marwat recorded the highest number of incidents with 12 attacks, resulting in six fatalities—including one security personnel, one religious figure, one militant, and three civilians. The attacks also left six individuals injured, including three security personnel. Bannu followed closely with eight attacks, resulting in seven fatalities, including four security forces personnel and three militants. Bannu also reported the highest number of injuries (11) and one case of kidnapping, suggesting heightened militant operational capacity in the district.

Dera Ismail Khan (DI Khan) recorded four attacks leading to three deaths—two security forces personnel and one civilian—and four injuries. The presence of two kidnapping cases from the district highlights the use of abduction as a tactic to intimidate or extract money. Tank, though reporting only two incidents, had a disproportionately high number of civilian injuries (seven), indicating targeted or collateral damage in populated areas.

Urban centers such as Peshawar and Kohat witnessed limited but impactful attacks. Peshawar saw three incidents resulting in two civilian deaths and two injuries, while Kohat reported two attacks that killed three civilians and injured two others. Although the number of attacks in these cities was relatively low, the targeting of civilians underscores the continued threat to urban security. Minor incidents were also reported from Charsadda, Lower Dir, Karak, and Malakand, with varying degrees of impact.

Notably, militant casualties dropped significantly in April (from 32 to 4) in these attacks suggesting that higher casualty rates and preparedness of the security forces to repulse such attacks (like those on police stations) made the militants revisit their operational strategy.

1.6.1 Notable Militant Attacks in Mainland KP – April 2025

- **Peshawar**: A Frontier Corps soldier was critically injured in Shahi Bala (Warsak Road), while Zahid Shah, a JUI affiliate, was shot dead during prayers in a mosque. Another attack killed a religious scholar and injured another on Dora Road.

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- **Lakki Marwat**: Militants ambushed police in Paharkhel Pacca and Darra Pezu, injuring officers and damaging vehicles. An elderly man was killed and others injured in Begukhel during an overnight militant assault involving RPGs. A Frontier Corps soldier was shot dead in Lawangkhel. Militants attempted to storm Shaheed Asmatullah Khan Khattak police station and planted explosives under Kot Kashmir Bridge.
- **Bannu**: A police constable was shot dead in Narmikhel. Militants attacked CTD personnel in Spin Tangi, killing three officers and injuring two. An IED blast in Shakandi injured two more officers. A militant attack was repelled at Bakkakhel police station. A schoolteacher was kidnapped in Miryan.
- **Dera Ismail Khan**: Militants killed one constable and injured four others in Chodhwan. Two more, including a police official, were shot dead near Musazai Adda. A militant attack on Daraban police station and an IED targeting DSP Syed Murjan were also reported.
- **Swabi, Charsadda, Kohat & Lower Dir**: Attacks included the killing of a former district nazim in Kohat, a constable and health employee in Charsadda, and a retired soldier in Lower Dir. Swabi's Jhanda police station faced a militant assault.
- **Tank**: Seven labourers were injured in a bombing at an under-construction Rescue 1122 office in Wazirabad.

1.6.2 Notable Security Forces Actions in Mainland KP – April 2025

- **Dera Ismail Khan**: Security forces killed nine militants, including ringleader Shireen, in Takwara. Later, four more militants were killed in Kulachi and two facilitators arrested in Daraban. Sophisticated weapons and explosives were recovered.
- **Lower Dir**: TTP commander *Hafizullah alias Kochwan*—linked to past cross-border attacks—was killed during an operation near the Afghan border.
- **Karak**: Police destroyed multiple militant hideouts in Bahadarkhel and surrounding mountains. Eight militants were killed in one raid; others were targeted in Wanki Sirajkhel and Rehmatabad.
- **Lakki Marwat**: Militants' attempt to kidnap a policeman was foiled by locals, resulting in the death of TTP commander *Abid*. Multiple IEDs were defused in Gul Waliabad, Wanda Maidali, and near Serai Gambila. Militants were repelled in Khankhel Mandozai in a joint action with locals. Hideouts were destroyed in Wanda Amir and forested Kurrum River areas.
- **Bannu**: In a major firefight, six TTP militants were killed and four injured. Another raid killed Fareed, son of former TTP deputy chief Maulana Faqir Muhammad, along with his guards. Militants were also neutralized in Kot Adil and repelled during attacks on police and health units.
- **Swat & Swabi**: Four militants were killed near Malak Ahmad Khan Baba Interchange in Swat. In Swabi's Shewa area, a TTP commander was killed during a raid.
- **Shangla**: Militants attacked a checkpoint and later targeted DPO Shah Hassan's convoy with an IED—both attacks failed to cause injuries.

1.7 Security Situation in Other Provinces/ Regions

In Punjab, the TTP carried out two significant attacks in Taunsa Sharif. In the first incident, two security personnel were abducted but later released following community

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mediation, signaling a concerning encroachment of TTP operations into interior Punjab. In a separate ambush, TTP militants injured two policemen during a patrol, using rockets and heavy weapons before retreating into hilly terrain. A major counter-terrorism success was recorded in Makarwal, where police forces killed 10 suspected militants in a well-coordinated operation without suffering any casualties. Moreover, a major intelligence breakthrough occurred with the arrest of Abdul Majeed at the Jhelum bus stand. He is alleged to be a Pakistani national working for the Indian military and reportedly involved in 47 attacks across Pakistan, with support from Indian Army officers.

Sindh experienced a series of targeted attacks and effective counter-terror operations. In Karachi, two targeted killings occurred—policeman was shot dead near Ghousia Biryani, and PPP Union Council chairman Amir Abdul Kalam was assassinated in Orangi Town by unidentified assailants. A cracker attack near the Jamshoro railway crossing in Dadu caused panic but no injuries. Meanwhile, in Qambar Shahdadkot, the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA) claimed responsibility for the killing of two Punjabi laborers working in wheat fields, underlining the continued ethno-separatist violence in rural Sindh.

Security forces in Sindh undertook a number of successful operations. In Karachi, a TTP operative, Jameel Ahmed alias Qari, was arrested for planning to film sensitive installations. Another arrest involved a Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) operative, Dahan alias Asif Chikna, and his associate Mohammad Shafi, linked to Karachi-based BLA operations. In Shaheed Benazirabad, CTD captured Abdul Ghani Brohi, a suspected SRA member, near the Habib Sugar Mills railway crossing, preventing possible militant activity.

No militant attacks were reported in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) during April 2025. However, a notable security development in the ICT involved the arrest of a TTP-affiliated militant in the Bhara Kahu area. The suspect, originally from North Waziristan, was apprehended by the Capital Police's Counter-Terrorism Department for allegedly filming sensitive locations and sharing the content online.

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2 KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN MILITANT LANDSCAPE

2.1 'Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen Pakistan': New Militant Alliance Challenges TTP's Monopoly

The most significant development in Pakistan's militant landscape was the formation of a new militant alliance "Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen Pakistan (IMP)", comprising the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group (HBG), Lashkar-e-Islam, and the newly emerged Harkat Inqilab-e-Islami Pakistan (HIIP). The announcement was made on April 11, 2025, simultaneously released through the official media wings of all three groups. It declared the formation of IMP as a unified front for "elevating the word of Allah," supporting the oppressed, and waging armed struggle (jihad fi sabilillah) under a shared ideological and organizational structure.

According to the founding statement, Mahmood ul-Hasan (محمود الحسن) will serve as the official spokesperson of IMP, while its media wing will operate under the name "Sada-e-Ghazwat-ul-Hind" (صدائے غزوۃ الہند). Following this announcement, all attack claims and public communications by the constituent groups have been issued exclusively under the IMP banner, signaling full operational consolidation.

Since its formal announcement, the IMP claimed responsibility for multiple attacks. While some claims were exaggerated, PICSS could identify attacks attributable to group in Peshawar (FC solider targeted in Shahi Bala area), Lakki Marwat (attack on policeman's house in Nasirkhel), Bannu (target killing of a policeman in Bakkhakhel, killing of two policemen in Kashu, and IED blast in Shakandi area), Khyber (snipper attack on soldiers in Tirah valley killing one and critically injuring another), and Bajaur (one IED attack injuring 10 people when FC vehicle was targeted while two attacks in Mamund area). The possibility of the group's involvement in attacks whose attribution is not clear cannot be ruled out.

The group itself boats its presence in parts of tribal districts (though footprints found mainly North, South Waziristan, Bajaur and Khyber) as well as Peshawar and southern districts. The presence of Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, which has already been responsible for several high-profile attacks across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in recent years, gives the alliance considerable tactical depth and field experience. Furthermore, there are credible indications that loyalists of Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA)—a faction that once rivalled TTP in scale and reach and now merged with the TTP—may join IMP due to growing rifts with Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud's leadership. Should this occur, IMP's operational scope could extend nationwide, significantly altering the balance of militant power in Pakistan.

The emergence of IMP has triggered a defensive ideological response from Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which sees itself as the sole standard-bearer of jihadi militancy in the country. While avoiding direct reference to the new alliance, TTP disseminated a series of ideological messages through its Bunyanum Marsoos media outlet. These included a written version of a speech by Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, emphasizing the need for unity under a single leadership, flag, and structure. He invoked the success of the Afghan Taliban as a model rooted in discipline and central authority and warned against divisions, which he blamed for past setbacks.

Moreover, articles titled "One Ameer, One Flag, One Movement: The Secret of Victory" and "The Necessity of Centralized Jihad" reinforced this theme. Similarly, an article

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“Why Jihad Should Be Carried Out Only Under the Leadership of TTP" authored by TTP leader Khalid Qureshi, published in the 36th edition of Taliban magazine. These narratives framed the emergence of independent groups as a threat to the cohesion of the struggle in Pakistan and suggested that such splintering allows infiltration by enemy intelligence agencies. Earlier, on April 13, senior TTP leader Mufti Nadeem Darwaish also published a short essay calling TTP the most structured and legitimate jihadi group in Pakistan and urging others to formally join its ranks through bay'ah.

While the discourse has remained doctrinal rather than confrontational, the tone reflects clear anxiety over the emergence of a rival pole. The ideological battle underway between TTP and IMP is as much about narrative ownership as it is about ground control.

The formation of IMP adds a new layer of complexity to Pakistan’s internal security landscape. The Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, a core member of the alliance, has a history of high-profile attacks, including ambushes on military convoys and targeted assaults in North Waziristan and Bannu besides suicide attacks. The potential regrouping of scattered militants under a new operational command raises the threat of renewed insurgent activity in tribal districts that had recently seen relative calm.

More significantly, if JuA-linked elements gravitate toward IMP, this could reignite violence in settled districts of Punjab, Sindh, and urban KP, where JuA once maintained active cells. A growing IMP could also lead to inter-group rivalry and splinter violence, especially if both alliances (TTP and IMP) begin competing for fighters, funding, and influence. The possibility of parallel command structures conducting independent operations may pose challenges for intelligence coordination, force deployment, and threat attribution.

In the short term, Pakistan’s security apparatus must monitor whether IMP’s operational activities remain localized or begin to spread. In the medium to long term, the durability of the alliance—and its ability to absorb disgruntled cadres from TTP or other defunct factions—will determine its potential as either a temporary rupture or a sustained militant force.

2.2 TTP Seeks Expanding Ideological and Operational Presence in Punjab

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has issued a veiled threat to residents of South Punjab’s Dera Ghazi Khan and Taunsa Sharif districts following reports of local resistance to the group’s militant infiltration efforts. In recent weeks, TTP fighters have attempted to establish an operational foothold in these areas—particularly in Taunsa Sharif, formerly a tehsil of DG Khan. However, strong public opposition in several localities reportedly forced the militants to withdraw, prompting the TTP to respond with a mix of intimidation tactics and ideological messaging.

Initially, threats were circulated through social media accounts managed by local TTP commanders. On April 16, 2025, the group escalated its rhetoric by releasing an official statement indirectly warning the local population and targeting members of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) for allegedly supporting the creation of state-backed peace committees. The TTP accused the government and military of attempting to replicate the "failed model" of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by forming anti-militant militias under the guise of

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community protection. It warned the people of Punjab against becoming "fuel for this fire," arguing that such initiatives aim to turn the public against the "Mujahideen."

What makes this development particularly significant is the group's release of a Punjabi-language version of the statement for the first time. The translation was disseminated via the TTP's propaganda platform, *Bunyanum Marsoos*, signaling an intent to connect with a broader and more localized audience. This linguistic adaptation indicates a deliberate effort to penetrate Punjab not only geographically but also socio-culturally, by tailoring the group's narrative to the region's native language. It reflects an evolution in the TTP's outreach strategy and underscores the group's growing focus on South Punjab as a potential sphere of influence.

Framing its struggle as an ideological and anti-establishment campaign, the TTP claimed it was not targeting the people of Punjab but rather the "corrupt, oppressive, and anti-Islamic military establishment" that has allegedly ruled the country for 77 years. The group invoked themes of honour, religious duty, and resistance, appealing to the *ghairatmand* (honourable) and *deen-daar* (pious) identity of Punjabis in an attempt to dissuade them from supporting or joining local peace efforts.

The TTP's use of both veiled threats and culturally resonant language reflects a calculated messaging strategy aimed at delegitimizing community-led resistance and intimidating local leaders. It also signals the expansion of the group's psychological and propaganda operations into Punjab—a province that, until now, has largely remained peripheral to its militant activities.

This development raises serious concerns about the potential for retaliatory attacks targeting civilians, community leaders, or peace committee members in South Punjab. It also suggests that the TTP is working to embed itself within Punjab's socio-political landscape by framing its conflict in localized, populist terms.

In its latest issue of the monthly magazine *Taliban*, the TTP has further intensified its propaganda targeting Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province. Two key articles—*"The Firm Footsteps of the Mujahideen in Punjab"* and *"Whose Side Are the People of Punjab On?"*—highlight the group's strategic push to expand its ideological and operational presence beyond traditional strongholds. Through these articles, the TTP appeals directly to Punjabi youth, urging them to reject the "corrupt system" in favor of an "Islamic order," while claiming increasing public support within the province.

The group portrays its presence as a force for moral reform rather than militancy, claiming to have curbed crimes such as theft and adultery. This narrative challenges the state's legitimacy and attempts to position the TTP as a growing grassroots movement. Such messaging represents a dangerous escalation that could threaten national cohesion if not countered through both robust security measures and sustained ideological engagement.

2.3 TTP's Sindhi Outreach: A Tactical Expansion of Propaganda Front

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has formally launched a new propaganda initiative targeting Sindhi-speaking audiences by translating and disseminating its content in the Sindhi

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language. Since April 25, a Telegram channel named "Breaking News Sindhi" has been publishing TTP's statements in Sindhi, signaling the group's intent to broaden its ideological outreach and potential recruitment base beyond its traditional Pashtun strongholds. Although the channel has attracted only 56 subscribers so far, the strategic messaging is significant. The TTP's statement accompanying the launch calls upon the "honorable Muslim brothers of Sindh" to join the "struggle for the implementation of Sharia" and urges them to support the group's mission. This move reflects TTP's broader effort to position itself as a national rather than an ethnic movement, aiming to exploit grievances in various provinces, including Sindh. By introducing localized propaganda, the group is not only diversifying its communication tactics but also testing the potential for ideological resonance among Sindhi audiences, which could pose new challenges for counterterrorism narratives and regional stability.

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3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN PAKISTAN

3.1 Discord in Dialogue: PTI's Dilemma or Calculated Move?

The recent disclosure by senior Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Muhammad Azam Swati about reaching out to the military establishment has sparked significant speculation, raising questions about the party's internal dynamics and its evolving strategy towards the military. Swati claimed in a televised interview that he had initiated contact with the establishment with Imran Khan's blessing and was expected to meet a "special personality" on April 23. He also named key figures like former President Dr. Arif Alvi as being part of this effort, suggesting a broader coordination than officially acknowledged.

Despite PTI's public position — reiterated by Secretary General Salman Akram Raja — that Swati's efforts were personal and unauthorized, the party's response has lacked the kind of strong disavowal one might expect. Imran Khan, known for using social media as a central political tool, notably refrained from commenting on the issue via his official X (formerly Twitter) account. In Pakistan's political culture, such silence can imply more than denial; it may reflect a deliberate strategy to keep communication channels open without making a public commitment.

This ambiguity is characteristic of the balancing act PTI currently faces. With Khan incarcerated and his communication severely restricted, second-tier leaders appear to be interpreting — or improvising — the party's strategic direction. On one hand, PTI must maintain its anti-establishment posture to retain the loyalty of its populist base. On the other, it cannot ignore the political reality that any path to relevance — particularly electoral — requires some degree of re-engagement with the powerful military establishment. Swati's assertions, while officially disowned, may thus represent a calculated attempt to initiate informal contact while preserving plausible deniability.

Raja's insistence that only Imran Khan can authorize such dialogue might reflect either a leadership disconnect or a carefully thoughout dual-track strategy — one that allows PTI to test the waters for re-engagement while officially holding the line. The episode also lays bare potential rifts within PTI's ranks: some factions remain committed to confrontation, while others, like Swati, appear inclined towards political recalibration.

In this context, the Indo-Pakistan crisis following the Pahalgam attack introduces a new variable. With national focus now shifting to external threats, the government and military establishment may find it opportune — or even necessary — to project internal stability and unity. This evolving geopolitical environment could open a narrow but significant window for political dialogue. If both sides choose pragmatism over posturing, the current moment might serve as the beginning of a cautious re-engagement — not as a result of reconciliation, but as a response to shifting national imperatives.

3.2 Extremist Violence and Mob Attacks in Pakistan: Alarming Trends and State Response

In April, Pakistan witnessed a deeply troubling surge in extremist violence and religiously charged mob aggression, most notably against international businesses and religious minorities. On April 14 in Sheikhupura, Punjab, a 45-year-old employee of an

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international fast-food outlet, Asif Nawaz, was fatally shot during a violent attack allegedly carried out by members linked to Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). The assailants opened fire from outside the outlet before fleeing the scene. This attack, which followed TLP-led anti-Israel protests earlier that week, was not an isolated incident. Just four days earlier, a similar attack targeted another branch of the same fast-food chain in Lahore's DHA area. Though there were no casualties in the Lahore incident, the violence marked a disturbing trend of targeting symbols associated with the West under the guise of pro-Palestinian solidarity. Despite the arrest of 40 suspects in Sheikhupura, the main shooter remains at large, and the government has registered the case under terrorism and murder charges.

These incidents are part of a broader pattern of rising religious extremism in Pakistan, with the TLP's actions standing out due to their repeated use of violence and incendiary religious rhetoric. While anti-Israel sentiments are widespread across the political and religious spectrum in Pakistan, TLP's violent mobilization distinguishes it from other actors. Rooted in the Barelvi school of thought, TLP has long exploited religious grievances to justify street agitation, target minority communities, and exert political pressure. Its past actions, especially against the Ahmadiyya community, show a persistent disregard for legal norms and human rights. If such conduct remains unchecked, the threat may not only expand to other regions but also jeopardize the operations of international companies and Pakistan's already fragile investment climate. A firm, consistent, and transparent state response is essential—starting with the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators, followed by a broader strategy to address TLP's conduct at both legal and socio-political levels.

The situation further deteriorated on April 19, when a lynching incident took place in Karachi's Saddar area. Laeeq Ahmad Cheema, a well-known member of the Ahmadiyya community and a witness in a previous case involving attacks on the same place of worship, was beaten to death by a mob after a TLP-led protest. The mob had gathered near the Mobile Market to prevent Friday prayers at the Ahmadiyya worship site. While law enforcement agencies managed to disperse the crowd and secure the premises, Cheema, who had been documenting the events, was later found and killed. Post-mortem reports confirmed his death due to blunt trauma. Karachi's DIG-South, Syed Asad Raza, identified three suspects also involved in a 2023 attack on the same site. Though the TLP officially denied involvement, claiming its protest was peaceful, widespread suspicion and eyewitness accounts implicate its supporters, reinforcing a pattern of ideological aggression under the pretext of religious piety.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) condemned the lynching, calling it symptomatic of systemic persecution enabled by state negligence. The Sindh Human Rights Commission also demanded an impartial investigation with a detailed report within 15 days. This episode occurred amidst a wave of heightened pro-Palestinian activism, which has provided fertile ground for opportunistic acts of violence. In total, over 20 attacks have been recorded on international food chains—primarily KFC—across major cities such as Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Mirpurkhas. These attacks were framed as protests against Israeli actions in Gaza but effectively manifested as destructive acts of vigilante justice, culminating in the deadly shooting in Sheikhupura.

State Minister for Interior Talal Chaudhry publicly condemned the violence, stating that such actions amount to terrorism and undermine foreign investment. He confirmed the arrest of 160 individuals and reiterated the state's commitment to safeguarding both

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domestic and foreign businesses. Religious scholars across sectarian divides issued condemnations of the violence, calling it un-Islamic, while mainstream political parties distanced themselves from the events. However, these statements of condemnation alone cannot substitute for concrete and systematic state action.

The recurring nature of such incidents, coupled with delayed and inconsistent enforcement, highlights the growing confidence and assertiveness of extremist mobs. Their actions, often cloaked in religious emotion and nationalist zeal, reveal a disturbing undercurrent of intolerance and ideological radicalization in Pakistani society. While the TLP continues to disavow responsibility for individual acts of violence, its persistent incitement and pattern of mobilization make such denials increasingly hollow. The state's ability to break this cycle depends not only on holding individual perpetrators accountable but also on addressing the ideological roots of extremism, reforming religious discourse, and ensuring that the constitutionally guaranteed rights of all citizens—regardless of faith or identity—are upheld. Failing to do so risks further emboldening violent actors, deepening societal divisions, and eroding the state's legitimacy in the eyes of both its citizens and the international community.

3.3 Canals Issue and Cenrte-Sindh Rift: Water Policy Needed

A significant political controversy has escalated between the federal government and the provincial government of Sindh, straining the dynamics between coalition partners, particularly the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The dispute centers around the construction of canals linked to the Cholistan irrigation project, which sparked strong opposition from the PPP-led Sindh government and several nationalist parties. The controversy initially unfolded with veiled criticism and later open opposition, including a parliamentary speech by former President Asif Ali Zardari and heated debates in the Senate, where the PPP and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) clashed over competing resolutions.

In response to widespread protests and rising political tensions, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif appointed senior PML-N leader Rana Sanaullah to initiate dialogue with Sindh-based nationalist and religious parties, including the JUI-F, Sindh United Party (SUP), and Qaumi Awami Tehreek. These parties demanded a complete halt to canal construction as a precondition for further talks. Simultaneously, PML-N representatives engaged with protesting lawyers in Khairpur, where the legal community had launched demonstrations, blocking roads and rejecting Sindh government appeals to avoid disruption.

The federal government eventually moved from backchannel engagement to direct negotiations. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah at the PM House, where Shah voiced strong concerns over the planned six new canals on the Indus River. On the same day, PML-N Sindh President Bashir Memon visited protest sites and met with key figures from the Karachi Bar Association to facilitate dialogue. In Sukkur, the lawyers presented a four-point charter of demands to the federal government, with the cancellation of the canal project at the forefront. They also raised objections to corporate farming, the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), and the proposed 26th constitutional amendment. The PML-N invited a 14-member lawyer delegation to meet with the Prime Minister, though the lawyers insisted the sit-in would continue until an official notification

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scrapping the project was issued.

The situation took a decisive turn when, following high-level meetings between PPP and PML-N leadership, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced that the controversial canal project would be halted until a consensus could be reached through the Council of Common Interests (CCI). Speaking alongside PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, the Prime Minister confirmed that no further canals would be constructed without provincial agreement. The CCI in its meeting on 28 April, endorsed halting the new Indus River canals project until provinces reach mutual understanding.

The escalating tensions over the canal project have exposed deep political and institutional rifts. While originally envisioned as a developmental effort, the project has evolved into a flashpoint at the heart of inter-provincial and intra-coalition politics. The PPP has had to publicly oppose the initiative to retain its credibility in Sindh, yet must navigate its role in the federal coalition with the PML-N. At the same time, opposition parties in Sindh have avoided targeting the military establishment—widely viewed as a driving force behind the project—and instead focus their criticism on the PPP's handling of the issue.

Caught between growing public discontent and behind-the-scenes pressures from the hybrid political system, both the PML-N at the center and the PPP in Sindh are under mounting pressure. As climate change intensifies the pressure on Pakistan's water resources, the imperative for inter-provincial consensus and institutional coherence becomes even more critical. The controversy has underscored the urgent need for a coordinated civil-military resolution to the water distribution issue. Moreover, India's abrupt and unilateral suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty has compounded the threats, highlighting the need for a robust, unified national water strategy.

3.4 Pakistan's Economic Outlook: Current Account Surplus and GDP Growth Projections

Pakistan's economic outlook presents a mixed picture, with significant improvements in the current account balance but subdued projections for GDP growth. The country posted a remarkable current account (C/A) surplus of $1.2 billion in March 2025, a stark reversal from a $97 million deficit in February 2025. On a year-on-year (YoY) basis, the C/A surplus surged by 230%, compared to $363 million in March 2024. This marks the highest-ever monthly surplus, bringing the total surplus for the first nine months of the fiscal year (9MFY25) to $1.86 billion, contrasting with a deficit of $1.65 billion in the same period last year. Key contributors to this positive development include a 71% increase in remittances, reaching $4.05 billion in March 2025, alongside an 8.7% rise in exports of goods and services. Despite a modest 8% increase in imports, the country's external account balance has been bolstered by low oil prices, high interest rates, and import restrictions, signaling a more favorable trade environment.

However, despite these improvements in external balances, the World Bank has downgraded Pakistan's GDP growth forecast for the current fiscal year from 2.8% to 2.7%, citing ongoing economic stabilization measures, fiscal constraints, and persistent structural inefficiencies. While inflation has been subdued and financial conditions have improved, growth remains sluggish due to tight macroeconomic policies. The World Bank projects

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modest growth of 3.1% in FY26 and 3.4% in FY27, but warns that downside risks persist, including policy slippages, debt vulnerabilities, and climate-related shocks. The country's growth is further constrained by weak sectoral performance, with agriculture impacted by weather disruptions and pest infestations, industrial activity affected by high input costs and taxes, and the services sector lagging behind. With a growing population, job creation and poverty alleviation remain significant challenges.

The World Bank has stressed the need for high-impact structural reforms to foster sustainable growth, including a fairer tax regime, competitive exchange rate policies, export-friendly tariffs, and public sector streamlining. Moreover, the Bank has highlighted the importance of digital transformation through investments in Digital Public Infrastructure, which can drive growth if supported by cohesive regulatory frameworks and multi-tiered government collaboration. Despite the current challenges, the positive trajectory of the current account surplus, alongside ongoing stabilization efforts, may provide a foundation for stronger economic growth in the medium to long term. However, current tensions between Pakistan and India could have serious consequences for Pakistan's economy. Moreover, the policy decisions made by the US on economic front would also impact Pakistan's economic outlook given the fact that the US is Pakistan's largest trading partner.

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4 INDO-PAK CRISIS: WILL THE SANITY PREVAIL?

India-Pakistan tensions dominated the airspace not only in Pakistan and India but also at the world stage. Although there are some early signs towards de-escalation, situation between India and Pakistan is quite tense with no certainty if the sanity will prevail or both the countries will further indulge in activities detrimental to regional peace. Important developments in India, Pakistan and international arena are discussed.

4.1 The Pahalgam Attack and the Resistance Front

A deadly attack in Pahalgam, a tourist destination in Indian-administered Kashmir, resulted in the deaths of 26 civilians and injuries to 17 others. Except one Muslim, all those were killed were Hindus. A statement attributed to the Resistance Front claimed the responsibility. Unprecedently, the statement attributed to the group did not contain name and logo of the group raising questions if the statement was originally from the group. The group issue statement denying its involvement. The group emerged in the aftermath of India's revocation of disputed J&K's special constitutional status in August 2019. While Indian authorities alleged that TRF is a proxy of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), though the possibility remains, however, there is another possibility, as some experts argue, that the group is a loosely structured coalition of disgruntled and breakaway militants from various Kashmiri outfits. These individuals, often deeply committed ideologically, reportedly chose to continue armed resistance even after Pakistan withdrew overt support for the armed struggle in Kashmir. Since its formation, the TRF has targeted non-Kashmiris, including migrant workers, and has been linked to a wave of targeted killings, particularly of members of religious communities such as non-Kashmiri Hindus. The group never shied away from taking responsibility for such attacks. Immediately after the incident, Indian media directly blamed Pakistan for harboring the perpetrators, suggesting a link to the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

4.2 Indian Response and Though Processes

In the wake of the incident, PM Modi summoned a meeting of the Cabinet Committee of Security. After the meeting, Indian Foreign Secretary Misri read the statement. India "resolved that the perpetrators of the attack will be brought to justice and their sponsors held to account". India suspended the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), expelled military advisors, downgraded diplomatic ties, closed the only border crossing and revoked visas of Pakistani nationals. Later India announced ban on Pakistani overflights in Indian airspace.

PM Narendra Modi held a series of high-level meetings with senior state and defence officials in Delhi this week. On 29 April, he met with the service chiefs, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), National Security Advisor, and the Defence Minister. Citing sources, Indian media reported that Modi gave the armed forces a free hand to determine the "timing, targets, and mode" of their response to the Pahalgam attack. On 30 April, India's Cabinet Committee on Security convened for the second time since the incident. That same day, India announced a ban on Pakistani aircraft—both commercial and military—from flying over its airspace.

Meanwhile, Indian media reported that the search for the suspected attackers continues without success. Indian police have identified three of the four suspected attackers, stating that

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two are Pakistani nationals and one is a local resident of Indian-administered Kashmir. No details have emerged about the fourth suspect.

In a widespread manhunt, security forces in Indian-administered Kashmir have detained nearly 2,000 people (unofficial claims are as high as 6000) and searched around 1,000 homes bests forested areas across districts such as Srinagar, Baramulla, Pulwama, Kulgam, and Islamabad. Detainees were taken to police stations and army camps, while security operations, including checkpoints and patrols, have intensified—especially in remote and forested regions. Reports also indicate that homes and properties allegedly linked to militants or their supporters have been demolished or burned. Critics, including local lawmakers, argue that such actions amount to collective punishment and risk sparking further unrest. There have also been reports of Kashmiris being targeted in other parts of India. Former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah warned the Indian government not to further alienate Kashmiris.

Amid the escalating crisis with Pakistan, the Modi government announced its plan to include caste identity in the upcoming national census. Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi has long advocated for a caste census. Analysts view the announcement as a political move by the BJP to divert public and media attention from the Pahalgam attack and its aftermath. Moreover, the delegation of authority by Modi to the armed forces has been interpreted as an effort by the Indian government to manoeuvre out of a growing "commitment trap." However, the silence of the Indian top leadership indicate that a lot of thought process is going on behind the public eye. Importantly, India did not official respond to Pakistani request of an independent and impartial inquiry as demanded by Pakistan showing Indian lack of interest in such inquiry.

4.3 Pakistan Seeking De-Escalation but Preparing for Firm Response

In response to allegations and retaliatory measures, Pakistan after a National Security Committee meeting rejected the allegations and demanded credible evidence, while enacting reciprocal actions: closing the Wagah border, ending trade, banning Indian aircraft from Pakistani airspace, and expelling Indian military advisors. Suspended visas to Indian nationals. Pakistan also threatened to suspend the Simla Agreement. Pakistan further warned that any water blockade would be treated as a direct act of war. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif accused India of backing anti-Pakistan militant groups such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), calling them Indian proxies in a low-intensity war.

On 26 April, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stated that Pakistan was open to a neutral, transparent, and credible investigation into the Pahalgam attack rejecting India's accusations as baseless and part of a continued blame game. Speaking at the Pakistan Military Academy in Kakul, he also warned India against any move to suspend or interfere with the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), declaring water as Pakistan's lifeline and vowing to defend it "with full force." Later in the day, Pakistan's Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi proposed a joint investigation with India into the recent Pahalgam and Jaffar Express hijacking, suggesting the formation of an international committee of neutral experts to ensure transparency. Naqvi alleged a nexus between India's intelligence agency RAW and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), claiming

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Indian involvement in terrorist acts within Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.[1]

In an interview with The New York Times, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif stated that Pakistan was willing to cooperate with any international investigation into the Pahalgam attack. He dismissed India's accusations linking Pakistan to the attack, asserting that Lashkar-e-Taiba was defunct, with its remnants either under arrest or inactive. He suggested the incident could have been a "false flag" operation by India to provoke tensions. In a separate interview with Sky News, Asif warned of an "all-out war" if India launched any military aggression against Pakistan.[2]

On 29 April, DG ISPR Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry accused India of activating its terror networks to intensify attacks in Pakistan, providing what he called "irrefutable evidence" of Indian state-sponsored terrorism. He claimed that Indian military personnel were behind these activities, with evidence of terrorist cells operating in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan. He also cited the arrest of Abdul Majeed, a Pakistani terror suspect allegedly trained by India, who was caught with explosives and linked to a terror network run by serving Indian military officials.[3] Notably, Pakistan's UN representative Jawad Ajmal claimed that Pakistan possesses credible evidence that the Jaffar Express attack, carried out by BLA on March 11, was externally sponsored by regional adversaries, specifically pointing to India as the main orchestrator and sponsor of terrorism in Balochistan. Speaking at the UN headquarters during the launch of a victims' network, called for international accountability for state-sponsored terrorism.[4]

In a significant development, the federal government on 29 April notified Lt Gen Muhammad Asim Malik, the current Director General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), as Pakistan's new National Security Adviser (NSA). This marks the first time a serving ISI chief will concurrently hold the NSA portfolio. A Cabinet Division notification confirmed that Gen Malik will retain his position as DG ISI, a role he has held since September 2024, while assuming additional responsibilities as NSA with immediate effect.

In a joint media briefing on 30 April, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, alongside military and Foreign Office spokesmen, rejected Indian allegations of Pakistan's involvement in the April 22 Pahalgam attack, calling them baseless and politically motivated. While strongly condemning the incident, Pakistan called for an independent and transparent international investigation into the incident and dismissed India's rhetoric and moves—such as suspending the Indus Waters Treaty—as provocative and destabilizing. Pakistan urged

[1] https://tribune.com.pk/story/2542429/interior-minister-calls-for-international-probe-into-pahalgam-jaffarabad-incidents

[2] https://www.dawn.com/news/1906694/pm-shehbaz-says-pakistan-open-to-neutral-transparent-probe-into-pahalgam-attack

[3] https://www.dawn.com/news/1907471/military-blames-india-for-recent-terrorism-spike

[4] https://www.dawn.com/news/1907327/pakistan-tells-un-it-has-credible-evidence-of-regional-adversaries-sponsoring-jaffar-express-attack

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international partners to support de-escalation and warned that any aggression would be met with a firm and timely response.

On 1 May, Army Chief General Asim Munir warned that any "misadventure" by India would be met with a quick and decisive response. Addressing troops during military exercises, he said, "Let there be no ambiguity: any military misadventure by India will be met with a swift, resolute, and notch-up response". Similar views were expressed after the Corps Commanders conference held in GHQ.

4.4 Suspension of Indus Water Treaty: A Dangerous Turn

India's unilateral suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty carries grave implications that extend beyond bilateral hostility. The treaty has long stood as a rare pillar of cooperation between India and Pakistan, offering a structured, depoliticized framework for the distribution of critical water resources from the Indus River system. Its suspension effectively dismantles one of the last functional confidence-building measures between the two countries. Practically, India held the agreement in abeyance for quite some time as last meeting of the commission (which was mandated to meet at once every year) was held in 2022 and since then India shied away from holding such meetings. Moreover, India had already formally approached India under Article-12 of the agreement seeking a mutual renegotiation and was awaiting Pakistan's response. Any practical suspension of the treaty, for agrarian Pakistan who already grappling with water scarcity and climate change-induced stress, raises existential concerns. Even though India currently lacks the infrastructure to significantly disrupt downstream flows in the short term, any unilateral control or manipulation—especially during dry months—could seriously impact irrigation, hydropower, and drinking water availability in Pakistan. The suspension introduces water as a new vector of conflict and sets a dangerous precedence. If this breakdown is not reversed, it could escalate into a water-security crisis with transboundary implications, potentially drawing both the countries into a direct conflict and war. Even the situation right now is quite delicate and could escalate further especially when Pakistan expects some Indian action posing serous challenges for regional peace and security as any action or miscalculation could have serious implications.

4.5 Border Skirmishes; Indian Airforce Manoeuvres and DGMOs Contact

Since 25 April, border skirmishes were witnessed between Pakistan and India mostly across the Line of Control. As troops from both sides have traded intermittent small-arms fire. Both sides blamed each other for starting these LoC violations. In the meanwhile, Pakistan also claimed to have drowned two Indian drones alleging that India using these drones for reconnaissance as well as dropping IED's into Pakistani territory for their subsequent use in militant activities. Pakistani media reported that Pakistan Air Force (PAF) detected four Indian Rafale fighter jets patrolling near the Line of Control (LOC), forcing them to retreat after conducting a coordinated response, on the night between April 29 and April 30. It was the same time when Pakistani Information Minister in a late-night presser shown the possibility of India taking a military action against Pakistan within 24-36 hours citing intelligence input. It may be noted that these developments had taken place after a weekly contact between the director generals of military operations between the two countries as per agreed protocol. Notably, weekly contact between director generals of military operations remained working as both the DGMOs talked on hotline on 29 April.

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4.6 International/ Regional Efforts to Defuse Situation

The international response has been marked by calls for de-escalation and restraint. While the world has strongly condemned the incident, the international community largely remained unconvinced of the so-called evidence India presented with regards to Pakistan's involvement. On 25 April, U.S. President Donald Trump expressed hope that both countries would resolve their disputes peacefully but offering no direct mediation. However, the deep state felt that the US cannot distance itself with the State Department emphasizing close monitoring and encouraging a "responsible resolution." While the U.S. publicly showed support for India post-attack, it refrained from criticizing Pakistan. Same was seen elsewhere in the world.

The UN Secretary General urged both India and Pakistan to avoid provocative actions and emphasized peaceful engagement offering his office to mediate if both the countries desire so. Regional powers including China, Turkiye, UAE, Saudi Araba and Qatar also called for restraint and dialogue. After initial reluctance manifested in President's assertions, the US entered into foray on 30 April with US secretary of state talking on phone with Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and Indian Foreign Affairs Minister Jaiskhankar. According to a US state department's press release, "Secretary Marco Rubio spoke with PM Shehbaz Sharif. The Secretary spoke of the need to condemn the terror attack on April 22 in Pahalgam. The Secretary urged Pakistani officials' cooperation in investigating this unconscionable attack and encouraged Pakistan to work with India to de-escalate tensions, re-establish direct communications, and maintain peace and security in South Asia".[5] Rubio also spoke to Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and encouraged India "to work with Pakistan to de-escalate tensions and maintain peace and security in South Asia." These statements indicate that the US pushed Pakistan and India to open lines of communication and directly engage each other. The US intervention seems to have worked and some early signs were witnessed showing possible de-escalation in near future though the chances of situation going out of hand have not diminished. Observers see appointment of the National Security Advisor from Pakistani side as an indicator that both the countries may engage in direct talks at the NSA levels. No disruption of weekly hotline contacts between DGMOs of Pakistan and India are also seen as positive developments.

An important statement came from China. China reaffirmed its support for Pakistan during a phone call between Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and Ishaq Dar, voicing concern over escalating tensions. China supported Pakistan's demand of impartial inquiry. Besides appreciating Pakistan's CT efforts, the statement noted, "China fully understands Pakistan's legitimate security concerns and supports Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and security interests". [6] This Chinese statement was unprecedented in nature and quite crucial. Indian commentators and analysts have taken it a direct threat from the Chinese side and translated the situation evolving for India of two-front war. While Chinese endorsement of impartial inquiry perturbed New Delhi, it was a diplomatic victory for Pakistan. Moreover, Chinese support for Pakistan's sovereignty and security interests was also translated

[5] https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/04/secretary-rubios-call-with-pakistani-prime-minister-sharif/

[6] https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbzhd/202504/t20250428_11605921.html

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negatively in India though it pushed Indian policy makers at the backfoot and to reconsider their policy choices. In the hindsight, Chinese might have realised that India was fully prepared to indulge in military adventurism posing serious challenges to regional pace especially when Pakistan is also adamant to respond to any Indian aggression. Hence, China put its weight behind Pakistan to diffuse the situation. If the situation calms down in days ahead, the US intervention and Chinese unprecedent statement might prove having greater role.

4.7 Circumstantial Evidence: Who Could Be Perpetrator

While it is too early to draw definitive conclusions about the perpetrators of the Pahalgam attack, certain circumstantial aspects of the incident raise intriguing questions and invite broader speculation about possible motives and actors. First, the failure of Indian security forces to prevent such an attack in a region known for its vulnerability to violence has become a point of contention. Indian opposition parties have questioned why proper security measures were not in place in an area frequently targeted by militants. This raises the possibility that the attack may have been allowed to happen—either due to incompetence or, more cynically, to further an internal political agenda or Pakistan-specific foreign policy objectives. In the worst case, as Pakistan suggests, it could be a false-flag operation as was witnessed in the form of Chattisingarpura incident in 2000 when US President Bill Clinton was on visit to India. The Pahalgam attack occurred during the visit to India of the U.S. Vice President. This coincidence raises the possibility that the attack could have been an attempt to exploit the heightened diplomatic attention surrounding the visit and draw U.S. focus to South Asia at a critical policy-setting stage of the new U.S. administration.

The third question arises regarding why Pakistan would engage in an attack that would almost certainly cast it in a negative light, especially when the repercussions could lead to further diplomatic isolation. Given the historical context and the current state of India-Pakistan relations, it would seem counterproductive for Pakistan to provoke India at this moment—particularly when it is already under intense pressure from internal militant threats. A significant escalation with India, which could risk border clashes or worse, does not align with Pakistan's strategic interests at this juncture. Furthermore, it is critical to consider why Pakistan would seek to create further trouble on its eastern borders when it is already facing significant challenges on its western front, particularly from groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baloch separatist militants. These groups continue to target Pakistani security forces and civilians, further destabilizing the region and leaving little incentive for Pakistan to open up a second front with India that would stretch its resources and invite unwanted international scrutiny.

The possibility of the RTF actually behind the attack cannot be ruled out though it is yet to be seen if Pakistani deep state has influence on the group. While India connects TRF to elements within Pakistan, it is equally plausible that the group may have acted independently or under the influence of factions pursuing their own agendas—possibly even without the knowledge or sanction of Pakistan's state apparatus if there are any linkages between them.

Equally important is the possibility of Indian deep state involvement, either through active orchestration or passive allowance, as a means to justify policy shifts, such as the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty. The swiftness of India's response—especially the

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mechanical decision to suspend the treaty amidst earlier calls for its renegotiation—suggests that a broader political strategy was already in place, merely awaiting a trigger. The coordinated media narrative, rapid attribution of blame, and selective leaks further raise suspicions about whether the attack was used as a pretext to advance domestic political goals or to isolate Pakistan diplomatically.

While circumstantial evidence remains inconclusive, the strategic calculus of various stakeholders, the timing of the attack, and the immediate political and diplomatic reactions warrant an independent investigation not only to diffuse current crisis but also place a firewall against any such crisis in future whose possibility always remains.

4.8 Where it Might Lead?

While Indian media was either carried away or deliberately mobilized to amplify the government's narrative, it came as a surprise to the BJP government that international media and global opinion did not align with India's claims—particularly the accusation of Pakistani involvement in the attack. Despite the Indian government's briefings to foreign diplomats, credible international outlets such as *The New York Times* and *Bloomberg*, citing multiple diplomatic sources, reported that India failed to present sufficient or credible evidence to substantiate its allegations. This divergence between domestic and international responses has placed the Modi government in a strategic bind. Having already created a media frenzy and war hysteria at home, the government now finds itself trapped in a commitment dilemma—under pressure to act in a manner that satisfies its domestic audience while aware that the international environment is not supportive of escalation. Among the strategic community in Pakistan, there is growing thinking that India will opt for a military strike sooner than later as India is mulling options. The only question is what will be the Indian final decision and its perceived or actual lethality and sensitivity in Pakistan followed by Pakistan's "notched-up" response and its lethality and sensitivity in India. The broader question that makes international community nervous, and rightly so, is the chances of this conflict not remaining "controlled" as some of the Indian thinkers/ commentors believes it so. Situation is fluid and could take an ugly turn at any time.

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5 PAKISTAN'S DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENTS

5.1 US-Pakistan Engagement: Setting Stage for Future Engagements

On 13 April, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir met separately with a visiting delegation of U.S. congressmen to discuss regional security, defense cooperation, and counterterrorism. The meetings, held ahead of a planned high-level Pakistani visit to the U.S., also addressed trade issues, including a recent 29% tariff on Pakistani exports.

The U.S. delegation—Capitol Hill's first visit to Pakistan in nearly two years—included Congressmen Jack Bergman, Tom Suozzi, Jonathan Jackson, and acting U.S. Ambassador Natalie Baker. General Munir focused on defense and regional security, while the delegation praised Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts and stressed the importance of continued bilateral engagement.

Minister Naqvi emphasized Pakistan's central role in the global fight against terrorism and called for greater intelligence and technology sharing. Talks also covered trade, investment, and border security, with Naqvi reaffirming the strategic importance of strong U.S.-Pakistan relations. Both sides expressed a desire to deepen ties, signing MoUs for IT sector collaboration. The U.S. delegation acknowledged Pakistan's sacrifices in fighting terrorism and backed enhanced cooperation, including a planned counterterrorism dialogue in June.

As the Trump administration gradually defines its foreign policy priorities, Pakistan is proactively engaging with U.S. stakeholders to establish areas of mutual cooperation, particularly in counterterrorism (CT) and regional security. Islamabad is seeking enhanced CT collaboration, including intelligence sharing, capacity-building programs, and access to advanced military equipment to bolster its counter-militancy operations. A key concern for Pakistan remains the persistent threat of Afghanistan-based militants, and it hopes to secure U.S. support in addressing cross-border terrorism.

The recent visit by a U.S. congressional delegation—the first in nearly two years—followed Special Envoy Tariq Fatemi's engagements in Washington, signaling a tentative but structured effort to rebuild trust. These interactions have set the stage for the upcoming Pakistan-U.S. security dialogue in June, where both sides are expected to discuss concrete measures for cooperation. While Pakistan emphasizes its role as a critical CT partner, the success of these efforts will depend on the Trump administration's evolving policy stance, particularly regarding Afghanistan, counterterrorism aid, and trade relations. Islamabad's ability to align its security concerns with Washington's strategic interests will determine whether this diplomatic push translates into sustained collaboration.

5.2 Cross-Border Tensions Rise After Killing of Pakistani Workers in Iran

On April 12, 2025, eight Pakistani nationals were brutally murdered in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province. The victims, all hailing from Bahawalpur in southern Punjab, were working at a car repair workshop in Mehrestan County. According to reports, unidentified gunmen entered the workshop at night, tied the workers' hands and feet, and shot them at

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close range before fleeing the scene. The Balochistan National Army (BNA) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Pakistan's Foreign Office condemned the killings as "inhumane and cowardly," urging Iranian authorities to conduct a thorough investigation and expedite the repatriation of the victims' remains. The Pakistani embassy in Tehran and the consulate in Zahedan have been actively coordinating with Iranian officials in this regard. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed deep sorrow over the killings and called on Iran to apprehend and punish those responsible. Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs also denounced the attack, labeling it a terrorist act and pledging to identify and bring the perpetrators to justice.

The incident underscores the persistent security challenges along the Iran-Pakistan border, particularly in Sistan-Baluchestan, which has witnessed repeated attacks targeting Pakistani nationals. Baloch militant groups are believed to exploit the porous borders, using Iranian and Afghan territories as sanctuaries. Activity by such groups has notably increased in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province. In response to previous Iranian attacks inside Balochistan, Pakistan had carried out retaliatory strikes last year, targeting suspected militant hideouts across the border.

The Pakistani government, reinforced by the military's stance, has shown clear resolve to eliminate terrorism from its soil. Addressing the Overseas Pakistanis Convention in Islamabad, Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir warned that not even "ten generations of terrorists" could harm Balochistan or Pakistan. He categorically stated that a "handful of terrorists" would never be allowed to dictate the country's fate, declaring Balochistan as the "jewel of Pakistan's destiny" and affirming the nation's collective determination to overcome all challenges.

In this context, enhanced cooperation between Pakistan and Iran is vital. As Pakistan intensifies its counterterrorism operations, there is a real possibility that militant elements may attempt to cross into Iranian territory to evade pursuit. Coordinated regional efforts are therefore necessary to deny these groups any safe haven and to stabilize the broader border region. The involvement of groups like the BNA highlights the complex and evolving nature of the militant threat, demanding a unified approach to regional security and border management between Tehran and Islamabad.

5.3 Meeting of Pakistan-Russia Working Group on CT

On 22 April 2025, Pakistan and Russia held the 11th meeting of their Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism in Moscow. The Pakistani delegation was led by Special Secretary (UN) Nabeel Munir, while Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin headed the Russian side. The two sides conducted a detailed exchange on regional and global terrorism threats, placing special emphasis on Afghanistan's evolving security landscape. Both delegations stressed the transnational nature of terrorism and the growing necessity for adaptive, collaborative approaches. The meeting concluded with a mutual reaffirmation of commitment to intensify counter-terrorism cooperation. It was agreed that the next session would take place in 2026.

This meeting indicate a growing convergence between Islamabad and Moscow on

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regional security issues, particularly concerning Afghanistan. Both countries share concerns over spillover effects from Afghan instability, such as increased cross-border militancy and the resurgence of groups like ISIS-K. The emphasis on the transnational nature of terrorism reflects a strategic alignment on countering non-state actors who exploit regional vulnerabilities. The reaffirmation of cooperative intent points toward a gradual but steady strengthening of Pakistan-Russia bilateral ties in the security domain—traditionally dominated by Pakistan's ties with Western allies. While largely symbolic, such engagements also signal both countries' intent to diversify strategic partnerships amidst shifting global alignments.

5.4 Renewed Pakistan-Bangladesh Diplomatic Engagement Amid Historic Irritants

In a significant development aimed at revitalizing long-dormant diplomatic ties, Pakistan and Bangladesh held the Sixth Round of Foreign Secretary-Level Bilateral Consultations in Dhaka on April 16, 2025—marking the first such meeting in fifteen years. The dialogue, led by Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch and her Bangladeshi counterpart Md. Jashim Uddin, unfolded against a backdrop of evolving regional dynamics and renewed efforts for cooperation.

Bangladesh reportedly raised long-standing historical grievances, formally demanding $4.52 billion from Pakistan as its share of pre-1971 assets and a public apology for the atrocities committed by the Pakistan military during the 1971 uprising. These claims include unpaid provident funds, international aid—particularly the $200 million provided for cyclone relief in 1970—and other financial assets. Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin emphasized that for any meaningful improvement in bilateral relations, unresolved historical issues must be addressed. Pakistani side assured that dialogue on these matters would continue, which Dhaka interpreted as a cautiously positive signal.

Bangladesh also revived the long-standing issue of repatriating over 324,000 stranded Biharis living in camps across the country. Questions are increasingly being raised in Pakistan as to why Bangladesh has not integrated these individuals, who had migrated to then-East Pakistan following the 1947 Partition. Many of these Biharis reportedly sided with the Pakistani military during the 1971 conflict and are viewed in Bangladesh as non-Bengalis. Critics argue that denying them integration on ethnic and political grounds, while simultaneously demanding their repatriation, raises humanitarian and moral concerns. If a formal apology from Pakistan could ease their suffering and an equal space, besides normalize ties, some in Pakistan believe it may be a step worth considering, especially given a shift in public sentiment.

Despite unresolved legacy issues, both countries explored avenues for cooperation. Discussions covered trade, investment, education, and climate resilience, with mutual proposals for academic and technical exchanges. The reopening of shipping routes between Karachi and Chittagong, easing of visa policies, and talks on launching direct flights highlighted a shared interest in improving connectivity and reducing economic imbalance—currently tilted in Pakistan's favor.

Cultural and multilateral engagement also featured prominently, with pledges to

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enhance cooperation in the arts, media, and sports. Both countries aligned on key global concerns, including support for Gaza and collaboration in forums such as the OIC and SAARC. Bangladesh, in turn, sought Pakistan's backing on the Rohingya refugee issue. The upcoming visit of Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar to Dhaka on April 27–28 is expected to sustain the current momentum.

While deep-seated issues remain, the diplomatic thaw and institutionalization of dialogue signal a potentially transformative moment in South Asian regional diplomacy. As both countries cautiously navigate complex historical legacies, the commitment to move forward through dialogue, respect, and shared interests marks a pivotal opportunity to reshape bilateral ties in a post-Awami League political landscape.

5.5 UAE FM Visit to Pakistan and Strengthening Strategic Partnership

UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan concluded a two-day official visit to Pakistan, leading a high-level delegation aimed at reinforcing bilateral relations. The visit reflected the recent momentum in UAE-Pakistan ties, with both countries reaffirming their shared commitment to building a broad-based strategic partnership encompassing political, economic, and cultural dimensions.

In Islamabad, Sheikh Abdullah held comprehensive delegation-level talks with Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar. Discussions spanned the entire spectrum of bilateral ties, with an emphasis on enhancing cooperation in trade, investment, energy, regional security, and people-to-people exchanges. Al Nahyan praised the pace of progress in bilateral relations over the past year and expressed hope that the "good spirit" driving this positive trajectory would continue.

The UAE-Pakistan economic relationship continues to be a cornerstone of bilateral cooperation. Trade between the two countries crossed $10.9 billion in FY 2023-24, significantly boosted by agreements signed in January 2024 worth over $3 billion. These agreements focused on critical infrastructure, including railway development, special economic zones, and port facilities. Moreover, the UAE's $10 billion investment pledge announced in May 2024 is set to further enhance cooperation in sectors such as energy, trade, and technology.

As a key outcome of the visit, two memoranda of understanding and one agreement were signed. These include the establishment of a UAE-Pakistan Joint Business Council and a Joint Consular Affairs Committee, as well as enhanced cooperation in cultural exchanges. The visit also explored new areas of collaboration in tourism, information technology, and sustainable development.

Sheikh Abdullah also met with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to convert its close political relations with the UAE into a strong economic partnership. Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir and ISI Director General Lt Gen Asim Malik were also present, highlighting the strategic significance of the engagement. The UAE side reiterated its determination to deepen the bilateral partnership and explore new avenues for growth and cooperation.

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5.6 PM Shehbaz Sharif's Visit to Türkiye: Strategic Ties and Terrorism Cooperation

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif concluded a productive two-day official visit to Türkiye aimed at strengthening bilateral ties and reinforcing cooperation in security, defence, and economic sectors. The visit, marked by high-level engagements and expressions of solidarity, emphasized the enduring friendship between Pakistan and Türkiye, with both sides committing to deeper collaboration on key regional and global issues.

In Ankara, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a bilateral meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, followed by a joint press conference. During the address, both leaders pledged to elevate the strategic partnership and work closely to combat terrorism. PM Shehbaz specifically highlighted the threats posed by the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), and proposed joint efforts with Türkiye to eliminate these terrorist networks.

President Erdogan reiterated Türkiye's unwavering support for Pakistan, recalling the brotherly assistance extended during crises, including the devastating floods of 2010 and 2022. Both leaders underscored the importance of intensifying defence cooperation, enhancing regional connectivity, and launching joint ventures in key sectors such as energy, mining, agriculture, and emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence and cybersecurity.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza also featured prominently in their discussions. Both leaders voiced grave concern over the situation, calling for an immediate ceasefire and urgent humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people. President Erdogan lauded Pakistan's consistent support for the Palestinian cause.

PM Shehbaz's delegation included Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, and Special Assistant Tariq Fatemi. Upon arrival at Esenboga Airport, the Prime Minister was warmly received by Turkish Defence Minister Yasar Guler and senior Turkish officials, including Pakistan's Ambassador to Türkiye and members of the diplomatic corps.

Prior to his departure for Türkiye, PM Shehbaz held meetings in Islamabad with representatives of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the Chinese space technology firm Galaxy Space. In his discussion with ITUC Secretary General Luc Triangle, the Prime Minister stressed Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change and the urgent need for international financial support to bolster adaptation and mitigation strategies. He emphasized the government's commitment to protecting livelihoods while pursuing climate resilience.

In his engagement with the Chinese delegation, PM Shehbaz expressed interest in enhancing cooperation in space technology, satellite communications, and satellite-based internet infrastructure. The meeting reflected Pakistan's broader goal of advancing technological integration with trusted international partners, particularly China.

The visit to Türkiye not only reaffirmed the strong historical and strategic ties between

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the two nations but also laid the groundwork for deeper engagement in economic development, security cooperation, and regional diplomacy.

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6 AFGHANISTAN: KEY SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

6.1 Administrative and Policy Decisions Under Financial Constraints

The Taliban regime is facing increasing domestic pressure as controversial financial decisions and widespread institutional downsizing fuel discontent across Afghanistan. In a particularly provocative move, Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada reportedly approved the allocation of $9 million from Afghanistan's constrained budget to fund religious seminaries in Pakistan's Balochistan, Sindh, and Punjab provinces. This comes amid stringent austerity measures at home, including a 12% reduction in government staffing and the suspension of pension payments.

The decision has triggered sharp criticism from Afghan citizens, particularly retirees who recently staged protests in Kabul over the non-payment of pensions. Demonstrators condemned the Taliban leadership for prioritizing foreign religious institutions over the basic needs of Afghan citizens facing severe financial distress. Despite a decree issued by Akhundzada four months ago instructing officials to resolve pension issues, retirees report that no substantial action has been taken.

Simultaneously, the Taliban has launched a sweeping downsizing campaign targeting both security forces and civilian government institutions. Defence Minister Mullah Yaqub Mujahid issued a directive, based on Akhundzada's April 12 order, mandating a 20% reduction in the security sector. The initial phase targets personnel deemed "undesirable and unpopular," who will be placed on "active reserve" status. The broader plan includes the phased removal of fighters recruited post-August 2021, individuals with tenuous ties to the Taliban insurgency, and those considered operationally redundant.

Civilian institutions are undergoing similar streamlining. Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed that the Ministry of Education has eliminated 90,000 positions, reducing its workforce to approximately 299,000. The Ministry of Economy plans a 13% staff reduction as well. Though official figures remain undisclosed, unofficial estimates suggest that over 300,000 government employees could be affected by these cuts. Analysts warn that the resulting economic pressure could exacerbate unemployment and poverty, urging the Taliban to prioritize private sector development and job creation.

In the political realm, Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani returned to Kabul after a two-month absence, calming speculation about internal rifts. He met with Refugees Minister Abdul Kabir to coordinate the repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees, focusing on ensuring their security upon return. In a related development, Atta Muhammad Amiri, a former provincial council chairman allegedly linked to anti-Taliban elements, returned to Afghanistan under the regime's amnesty policy. His meetings with Taliban officials in Panjshir appear aimed at showcasing a willingness to reconcile with former adversaries.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis continues to deteriorate. The suspension of U.S. aid has left millions vulnerable, particularly women and children. The International Rescue Committee reports that more than 22.9 million Afghans require urgent

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assistance amid worsening poverty, widespread malnutrition, and the near-collapse of the health sector. The Ministry of Economy confirmed that 37% of UN-funded programs were previously financed by the U.S., impacting 31 NGOs since the funding halt. The United Nations has expressed serious concern over a widening funding shortfall for humanitarian operations in Afghanistan. UN officials visiting Kabul emphasized women's rights and girls' education in their discussions with Taliban leaders but received no assurances. Aid efforts continue to face obstacles due to Taliban-imposed restrictions and the centralized control over aid distribution. The United States has placed its assistance under a 90-day review to ensure it does not indirectly benefit the Taliban, although no final decision has been announced. Under financial duress, Taliban are required to make arrangements for influx of returning Afghan refugees from neighbouring countries especially Pakistan and Iran.

6.2 Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Security Concerns and Diplomatic Re-engagement

In April 2025, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations remained strained but active, marked by growing security concerns, contentious refugee repatriation policies, and cautious diplomatic outreach. A central source of tension continued to be Pakistan's allegations that Afghan soil is being used by militant groups such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), and Baloch separatist groups to launch attacks across the border. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reiterated Pakistan's position that the Taliban must honor their commitments under the Doha Accord and prevent terrorism emanating from Afghan territory. Islamabad remains particularly concerned over increased attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, which it links to militant sanctuaries in Afghanistan.

Further aggravating the situation, reports by The Washington Post and BBC in mid-April revealed that a significant cache of U.S.-made weapons, originally supplied to Afghan forces before the Taliban's 2021 takeover, has ended up in the hands of militants operating in Pakistan. These weapons, including M4 and M16 rifles and night-vision devices, have reportedly empowered groups such as the TTP and Baloch insurgents. One such weapon was recovered after a deadly train hijacking in Balochistan. Pakistan sees the uncontrolled spread of these weapons as a grave threat to national security and has called on the United States to take action, including possible buybacks or tracking of the arms. The Taliban, for their part, deny allegations of harboring militants or permitting weapons smuggling, insisting that such accusations are meant to deflect attention from Pakistan's internal challenges.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's aggressive push to deport undocumented Afghan nationals has added another layer of friction. Since September 2023, over 860,000 Afghans have been forced to leave Pakistan, with nearly 60,000 deported in just the first two weeks of April 2025. The second phase of deportations now targets over 800,000 undocumented Afghans, including those with expired Afghan Citizen Cards. Additionally, registered refugees with valid UNHCR Proof of Registration (PoR) cards have been asked to vacate Islamabad and Rawalpindi by June 30. The Afghan government has condemned the expulsions as inhumane, urging Pakistan to allow voluntary, dignified repatriation and proposing international monitoring mechanisms.

Despite the hardened positions on terrorism and refugees, April also witnessed a notable thaw in diplomatic exchanges. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Kabul for meetings with Afghanistan's Acting Prime Minister Mullah Hasan

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Akhund and Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi marked a shift toward engagement. While Afghan leaders reiterated that they would not allow their territory to be used against Pakistan, no concrete public commitments were announced regarding action against the TTP. However, Pakistani sources hinted at a possible phased approach, where Kabul might first act against Baloch insurgents and later turn attention to the TTP—though this remains unconfirmed.

In parallel, a high-level Afghan delegation led by Commerce Minister Nooruddin Azizi visited Islamabad from April 16 to 18, accompanied by Deputy Minister for Refugees Sheikh Kaleem-ur-Rahman Fani. The delegation met with Pakistani counterparts to address trade facilitation, transit issues, and refugee repatriation. Afghan officials urged Islamabad to ensure humane treatment of refugees and called for the formation of a joint committee, with potential international involvement, to manage deportations. In response, Pakistan pledged that deportees would be treated with dignity, allowed to carry their movable property, and given access to a complaint mechanism overseen by the Interior Ministry. A separate committee was also proposed to handle disputes over immovable property sales.

Trade and economic incentives were also used as diplomatic levers. Dar announced a 10% reduction in export taxes on selected goods to facilitate commerce and pledged further trade enhancement measures. Both sides agreed to establish joint follow-up committees to address ongoing issues, with an emphasis on improving border management and fostering regional connectivity.

In nutshell, April 2025 illustrated a complex and evolving landscape in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. While tensions over terrorism and refugee management remain unresolved, increased diplomatic engagements and the formation of joint mechanisms signal a tentative move toward conflict management and cooperation. Yet, the success of these efforts will largely depend on the Taliban's willingness to act against militant groups and Pakistan's ability to balance domestic security concerns with diplomacy.

6.3 International Developments Related to Afghanistan

A series of significant international developments has recently taken place surrounding Afghanistan, reflecting the growing complexity of regional and global engagement with the Taliban-led Islamic Emirate. From April 7 to 11, Russia and Tajikistan conducted joint counterterrorism exercises near the Afghan border, deploying advanced assets including drones, helicopters, and tanks. These drills coincided with high-level consultations between the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Secretary-General and the Tajik President, resulting in an agreement on a new five-year border security program commencing in 2025. The CSTO, composed of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus, and Armenia, has identified Afghanistan as an increasing source of instability due to terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking. A CSTO spokesperson warned of intensifying security risks along Tajikistan's border, prompting the bloc to enhance military coordination and preparedness.

Simultaneously, Russia has taken a pivotal step toward re-engagement with the Taliban by suspending the group's terrorist designation through a decision by its Supreme Court. While the move remains unilateral and does not alter the Taliban's status at the UN, it

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signals Moscow's readiness for deeper diplomatic and economic engagement. This change has been followed by renewed infrastructure cooperation discussions, including plans to repair the Salang Tunnel and expand Afghanistan's railway network. Russia also invited Taliban representatives to the Kazan Economic Forum and supported Kabul's decision to appoint an ambassador to Moscow. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's Ministry of Energy and Water has begun seeking Russian investments in energy and water projects. Russia's Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu emphasized Moscow's broader commitment to safeguarding its interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia through regional platforms like the CSTO and SCO, ahead of a major security conference scheduled for late May.

China continues to expand its role as a key trade partner of Afghanistan, with bilateral trade reaching $1.5 billion in 2024, marking a 19% year-on-year increase. This growing partnership is facilitated by tariff eliminations on Afghan goods and new air connectivity, while both sides reaffirmed their intent to maintain close cooperation. Kazakhstan has also emerged as an important partner, recently pledging $500 million in investment to develop Afghanistan's railway infrastructure and signing a roadmap to triple trade volume to $3 billion. Proposed initiatives include new Kabul–Astana flights, simplified visas, and expanded cooperation in mining, technology, and finance. Turkey has rekindled relations with the Taliban as well, with plans for a joint trade and cultural commission, prisoner transfer mechanisms, and relaxed visa policies discussed in recent diplomatic engagements. Similarly, Qatar remains a key interlocutor for the Taliban's outreach to the West. An upcoming visit by Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to Doha highlights the importance of Qatar's mediation role in securing international aid and advocating for sanctions relief.

India has also reengaged, with its special envoy meeting Muttaqi in Kabul to explore opportunities for reviving infrastructure projects and enhancing trade, despite ongoing tensions with Pakistan. Trade between India and Afghanistan has grown to $890 million, although the latest India-Pakistan strains have disrupted border trade flows. In Uzbekistan, Muttaqi advanced talks on the Trans-Afghan railway and proposed trilateral transit discussions with Pakistan. Afghan exports to Uzbekistan have reportedly tripled, reflecting closer regional economic integration. Russia and Uzbekistan have also announced joint efforts to design rail links extending across the CIS, China, and Europe via Afghanistan. Further multilateral discussions on Afghanistan's stability took place in Baku, where representatives from 20 countries called for enhanced coordination in counterterrorism and regional peacebuilding. However, Afghan analysts criticized the exclusion of Taliban representatives, warning that sidelining them would undermine the effectiveness of such initiatives.

Meanwhile, the United States is advancing legislation aimed at tightening financial restrictions on the Taliban. The House Foreign Affairs Committee passed the "No Tax Dollars for Terrorists Act," which would block any U.S. taxpayer money from indirectly benefiting the Taliban, including via international aid channels. Given that approximately $40 million per week flows into Afghanistan's banking system from the US through international organizations, strict enforcement of this bill could severely impact the Taliban's economic lifeline. The 90-day halt the Trump administration has already shown signs of troubles in Afghanistan. The threat of further cuts to World Food Programme aid—already strained due to reduced U.S. funding—could exacerbate the country's humanitarian crisis and heighten economic pressure on the regime. In parallel, Pakistan continues to raise concerns about

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Taliban support for militant groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), alleging that U.S.-origin weapons left behind in 2021 are now being used in cross-border attacks. The Taliban deny these claims, asserting control over all abandoned arms. Tensions have escalated further with Pakistan's ongoing mass deportation of Afghan refugees—over 860,000 since September 2023—which Kabul has condemned as inhumane and destabilizing.

On one hand, countries like Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Qatar, and India are cautiously expanding ties with the Taliban, driven by pragmatic interests in trade, regional connectivity, and stability. On the other hand, the U.S. and its allies continue to isolate the Taliban financially, particularly over concerns regarding terrorism, human rights, and women's education. Pakistan's security concerns and refugee repatriation policies further strain bilateral ties. While there are signs that diplomatic and economic pressure is prompting some recalibration in the Taliban's approach, whether these shifts will translate into lasting policy changes remains uncertain. A fragile regional consensus is emerging that acknowledges the Taliban's de facto authority while seeking to engage selectively to safeguard national interests and contain cross-border threats.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AJK	Azad Jammu & Kashmir
Arst	Arrested by Security Forces
C	Civilian
CBA	Cross Border Attack
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CTD	Counter Terrorism Department of Police
CrK	Cracker
FATA	Federally Administrated Tribal Areas
FC	Frontier Corps (paramilitary force)
GB	Gilgit-Baltistan
GrA	Grenade Attack
IED	Improvised Explosive Device or Handmade bombs
IBO	Intelligence-based operation
ICT	Islamabad Capital Territory
ISKP	Islamic State Khurasan Province, known as DAESH
ISPP	Islamic State Pakistan Province known as DAESH
KP, KPK	Khyber Pakhtonkhwa
K	Kidnapping
KK	Kidnapping and Killing
Kdnp	Kidnappings by militants
M	Militant
MA	Militant (physical) Assault, recoded as TA
MAs	Militant Attacks
MC	Militant Clash
MrS	Mortar Shelling
Nos	Number of incidents
PGR, RZ	Razakar (Pro government tribal militias)
RA	Rocket Attack
SFAs	Security Forces Actions
SFP	Security Forces Personnel
SA	Suicide Attack
TA	Tactical Assault (formerly coded as MA)
TK	Targeted Killing
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
TJP	Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan

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ABOUT PICSS

Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) is an Islamabad based independent think tank with special focus on studying anti-state violence in Pakistan. PICSS was formally launched in 2014 with the vision "*To work as an institution that provides authentic, credible, reliable, up to date, and efficient information and objective analysis related to defense and security, for policy development leading to peace and stability*". Former foreign secretary and senator (retd) Akram Zaki (late) was its first chairman who continued to hold the position till his demise in November 2017.

PICSS maintains a database of militant attacks and security forces actions in Pakistan since 9/11 (known as PICSS Militancy Database). It also issues Daily, Weekly, Monthly, and Annual Security Assessment Reports based on information collected through open sources as well as its own correspondents in conflict zones. PICSS reports can be subscribed, at a nominal contribution/ subscription to meet the cost (write to info@picss.net for subscription). PICSS is part of Casualty Recorders Network established by Oxford Research Group (UK), which is a network of organizations working on studying conflicts and maintaining databases.

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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. Following sources of information are used to collect data:

- 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.
- Government offices, e.g. ministry of interior, police, ministry of health
- Own correspondents: We have our own network of two types of correspondents
    - PICSS own correspondents in Khyber Pakhtunkwa, FATA and Balochistan.
    - Volunteer's network: Local journalists and volunteers contribute voluntarily in reporting violent incidents and other militancy related developments.

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 government, public, or private targets. These targets can be against life or property e.g. government installations such as gas pipe lines, electricity transmission lines etc.
    - Militant clashes among different militant groups
- Security Forces Actions
    - Violent responses in which arms/weapons are used
    - None-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, 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 connection of anti-state intentions. Sectarian violence has different dynamics and requires separate analysis.

Different factors are kept in view while deciding that an incident is anti-state or not. Following factors are taken into account while categorizing whether an incident is anti-state or otherwise:-

- Target.

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- Generally target of a violent militant attacks helps to define the nature of attack. Activities in which government installation are targeted are considered anti-state.
- Attack against on-duty uniformed personnel of security forces are recorded as anti-state
- Attacks against a groups 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 is evaluated from different aspects. Only being a member of government or military is not enough to determine whether the aim was to target state or it was due to personal enmity. In such cases perpetrators and other circumstances are used to determine the nature of the attack.

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

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