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# Resurrection of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan Amidst Afghan Regime's Indifference: Threats to Intersectional Security Strands in the Region

Syed Sibtain Hussain Shah [1] , Arshad Mahmood [2] , and Muhammad Kamran [3]

[1] Department of International Relations, National University of Modern Languages, Pakistan
[2] Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (NIPCONS), National University of Sciences and Technology, Pakistan
[3] Faculty of Management, Collegium Civitas, Poland

**Correspondence:** Muhammad Kamran (muhammad.kamran@civitas.edu.pl)

## Abstract

As the Afghan Taliban came to power in August 2021, the terrorist attacks by the Afghanistan-based Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operatives intensified in Pakistan. Despite Pakistan's repeated requests, the Taliban's regime looked the other way and facilitated a renewed spate of TTP-led terrorism in Pakistan, specifically its regions dividing the two countries. This article scrutinizes the multifaceted threats of TTP's brutal resurgence to intersectional security strands in the strategically important region and their impact on the complex relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Drawing on the analysis of historical context and contemporary terrorist growth in Pakistan's territories, the study elucidates the evolving dynamics in the frontier regions and settled areas and bilateral relations in the wake of TTP's resurrection in the period of 2021–2024. The investigation employs a mixed method combining a qualitative approach for the analysis of historical ties, bilateral diplomatic discourse, and measuring intensification of terrorist incidents in Pakistan since 2021 with quantitative data. The study leads to a rational perception of the complicated interplay between states and non-state actors, regional geopolitics, and Pakistan–Afghanistan relations in the era of heightened uncertainty on Afghan soil with a potential to project regional terrorism. Furthermore, intersectionality as a framework of analysis helps in gauging the impact of socio-political, cultural, and economic elements with regard to targeted communities while evaluating the extent of injustices on account of race, gender, class, and ideology (religious belief).

## Keywords

Afghanistan; intersectionality; Pakistan; regional terrorism; security; Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan

## 1. Introduction

The return of the militant group Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from Afghanistan to Pakistan's terror landscape since the middle of 2021 has severely hampered peace efforts in the country, including its tribal regions bordering Afghanistan. Basically, TTP emerged as an insurgent force in Pakistan, including the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas, commonly known as former FATA, against Islamabad's support to Washington, in the aftermath of the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan. Comprising various combative factions, the group is a joint Pakistani militant organisation that is not only inspired by the ideology and violent activities of the Afghan Taliban, but it was the Afghan Taliban themselves that helped form the group in 2007 (Feyyaz, 2013). Initially fighting against NATO forces in support of the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan, TTP later initiated a self-justifying fight against the Pakistani security forces by declaring them as infidel forces that were a legitimate target of the terrorist entities—TTP and its affiliates. After the US withdrawal, the void was exploited by TTP, and Afghan Taliban's indifference further complicated the security milieu along the bordering regions.

TTP was misusing Islamic ideology for power politics with the aim of establishing an Islamic Emirate in the country in accordance with the rigid religious ideology through violent means, circumventing existing constitutional arrangements in the country. Their extra-constitutional demands are not only democratically untenable, but, given the dangers to national sovereignty and territorial integrity, they are a non-starter for the State of Pakistan and should not be accepted for a cease-fire with TTP (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023). Over the years, TTP intensified its terror campaign targeting security forces, religious minorities, and civilians alike, precipitating the death toll of the security forces, adding to the security dilemma of the State of Pakistan and the sense of insecurity for targeted communities, and threatening other elements of intersectionality, already almost non-existent in the terror-stricken zone (National Counterterrorism Center, 2022).

After Pakistan's military "Zarb-e-Azb" operation involving thousands of troops in Waziristan and other Pakistan border areas in 2014–2015, many of TTP's activists escaped to Afghanistan (Javaid, 2016). The group used the Afghan territory as a safe haven and logistical hub for planning and launching attacks into Pakistan. Pakistan had been complaining about a lack of cooperation from the Afghan side. The Afghan authorities not only shrugged off the demarche from the Pakistani authorities but started supporting their ideological conglomerate—the TTP. The Pakistani Taliban group is known for its ideological resemblance to the Afghan Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan (Hussain, 2023a). A loose immigration apparatus on border crossings between the two countries complicates the separation of civilians crossing into Pakistan and terrorists infiltrating in the guise of refugees (Razvi, 1979).

The mistrust between the two states has persisted since 1947—a chequered history of relations at best. Besides political differences, Afghanistan disputes the British era's (1893) border demarcation, foiling any effort to strengthen border control and immigration processes (Chaudhri, 1955). Afghanistan's claim of absorbing a large area of modern-day provinces of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Balochistan into their traditional homeland "Pashtunistan" can be termed as irrational and unjustified given the legal and political realities (Chaudhri, 1955). Pakistan, as a neighbour of Afghanistan with security and social integration affected by the shared community living on both sides of the borders and whose economic prosperity is partly intertwined with Afghan cooperation, has supported all Afghan governments, especially the Afghan Taliban regime. However, this support has proved to be a futile effort (Hanauer & Chalk, 2012).

After the Taliban group came to power in Afghanistan in 2021, TTP regrouped and strengthened its organisational structure, improved its weaponry systems, and enlarged its local support base on Afghan soil. It relocated its combatants from Afghanistan to Pakistan and demonstrated greater ferocity and lethality in its terror strikes, particularly against the Pakistani security forces (Sayed & Hamming, 2023). The pattern of terrorism substantiates scholarly findings that TTP is expanding its operations from bordering regions to nearby settled districts and towns for political concessions. To support this argument, this scholarly work established that the number of its claimed attacks more than tripled between 2020 and 2022 compared to the previous two years. Additionally, a report confirms that 500 civilians and a similar number of security forces were killed in 2023 alone, marking the highest fatality rate in the country in the last six years (Gul, 2023b).

In the first three months of the year 2024, TTP militants present in Afghanistan continued their deadly attacks against the Pakistani security forces and their installations. After the failure of hectic diplomatic efforts, the Pakistani authorities conducted air strikes against the suspected militants' hideouts in Afghanistan on March 18, 2024, two days after the death of seven Pakistani soldiers, signalling their resolve to not only hunt down the terrorists operating against the State of Pakistan but also making the Afghan Taliban's complicity costly at home and abroad (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a). Pakistan's airstrikes on Afghanistan's soil followed by the Afghan Taliban's retaliatory attacks caused severe tension between the two countries ("Key Afghan-Pakistani border crossing closed," 2023; Roggio, 2024). Due to these stressful events, difficulties have increased for the estimated 1.5 million Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan, in spite of 600,000 Afghan refugees having already been extradited to Afghanistan since 2021 (Gluck, 2023). In addition to emerging trends of terrorist entities, perpetrating the mayhem, the consequent security/military dimensions are part of the analysis, causing a security dilemma for the State of Pakistan.

However, components of intersectionality, such as race, gender, and class, which face injustices because of distinct individual or group identities, are part of this inquiry. The social and political alienation and economic deprivations cause a sense of insecurity among individuals and groups who unwillingly align themselves with terrorists due to physical harm and other forms of injustice. In the region under review, the oppression and terror as an instrument of coercion are being blatantly used for local support and extortion. It is a complex scenario wherein human security faces dangers as result of aggression by terrorists. The physical harm and destruction of property and business are the outcome of terrorist activism. Concomitantly, injustices on account of race, gender, religious belief (identity), and socio-economic deprivations interlinking intersectionality continue unabatedly. Under this backdrop, the hypothesis set forth is the following: "The TTP-led terrorism is causing a security dilemma for the State of Pakistan besides a sense of insecurity among vulnerable communities, accentuating race, gender, and ideology-based injustices under the key intersectionality concepts." Using this hypothesis, the dependent variable is terrorism, whereas the independent variable happens to be two-fold: the security dilemma for the State of Pakistan; and, secondly, injustices to vulnerable communities on account of race, gender, and ideology. One may also assume two independent variables: terrorism-induced security dilemma and the injustices based on race, gender, and ideology. The study aims at exploring the relationship between variables with a view to testing the hypothesis set forth earlier.

This article conducts an inclusive literature review covering the conceptualization of intersectionality and the impact of terrorism, specifically focusing on the terror activism of TTP, to identify gaps in the

scholarly work. A theoretical perspective and methodological framework are also presented for a better understanding of the topic. The article evaluates emerging dynamics of terrorism, including the resurgence of TTP in Pakistan since 2021, the Afghan Taliban regime's apathy, threats to intersectional security strands, and resultant injustices, all to accomplish the study's objectives based on the research question outlined in the methodological framework.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature on the subject is found in abundance and various nuances of terrorism have been unveiled by scholars and experts locally and internationally. The evaluation of the literature is divided into two sections, one about conceptualizing intersectionality and security, and the other on the terror involvement of TTP.

### 2.1. Conceptualizing Intersectionality and Security Impacted by Terrorism

The concept of intersectionality discusses the interaction of social identity arrangements such as race, class, and gender with human practices, especially experiences of freedom and oppression (Gopaldas, 2013). Intersectionality as an approach deals with social and racial discrimination of women, markedly black women in the US; however, it is neither limited to any exceptional race or colour, nor any specific region (Al-Faham et al., 2019). Intersectional security refers to the interconnected nature of various security challenges; for instance, human insecurity, economic insecurity, environmental degradation, and social inequality can intersect and exacerbate one another. Rationalising human security, the prominent Pakistani economist Hafiz A. Pasha argues, "it's a freedom from fear referring to the protection of individuals from direct threats to their safety and physical integrity" (Pasha, 2023, p. 4). The scholar maintained that this involves violence originating from actions by alien states, from the actions of a state against its inhabitants, from the activities of groups against other groups, and from the actions of individuals against other individuals (Pasha, 2023, p. 4). Moeed Yusuf, Pakistan's former national security advisor, who introduced economic security into the national security policy of the country for the period of 2022–2026, assumed that it is more practical to keep economic safety as central and thoughtfully transfer the shares of a strong economy to the strengthening the defence and human security of a country (National Security Division, 2022).

Magnifying the scope of human security, a study highlighted economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security as essential for human security (Maria, 2014). Another academic contribution explains the components of human security by referring to the 1994 report by the UN Development Programme which emphasised a preference for human development and empowerment through ensuring basic needs and the protection of human beings and their values, i.e., assets, norms, traditions, and ideology (Acharya, 2020). Hence, linkage among various elements of intersectionality needs greater emphasis in this region. The question of political empowerment, economic security, health and food security, and societal liberties could only be ensured after defeating terrorism and restoring peace in the territory. In societal studies, an intersection "denotes the crossing, juxtaposition, or meeting point of two or more social categories and axes, or system of power, dominance, or oppression" (Atewologun, 2018). The review of the literature on the concepts of intersectionality and security strands exposes that intersectionality and security concepts have been discussed by many scholars, but there is less academic work related to the concept of various components of security in the light of security threats erupted due to the recent terror engagement of TTP in the area.

Social discrimination is a broader canvas, and scholars have approached this theory in multiple ways. They included factors varying from race, gender, class, ideology, culture, and political-economic rights. Intersectionality is an old concept advocating females' rights in society wherein women were discriminated against on race and colour. Gradually, analysis using intersectionality as a theory or framework was broadened by bringing in all facets of political, economic, religious, and social rights so that individuals and minority communities are not differentiated on exploitable features, as opposed to the majority community availing all such rights. Intersectionality is an interdisciplinary concept, encompassing multiple notions falling in the realm of sociology, psychology, and feminism in the wider context of socio-economic freedom and equal opportunities as part of human security.

Discrimination based on social identities—a particular race, class, or group—is an integral part of the concept of intersectionality, impacted by a spate of terrorism. Terrorism is being used as an instrument of power projection and is usurping the political and social rights of weaker segments of society that are being coerced into supporting the obscurantist ideology of the Afghan Taliban and their conglomerates, especially TTP. The saner voices in the former tribal regions of Pakistan that resist terrorist ideology and support the security forces are eliminated to terrorise the locals. Women are intimidated and their fundamental rights of education and health are denied by the blasting of the facilities that symbolise these rights/institutions in the region. TTP has forced the State of Pakistan to divert maximum resources to bolstering security forces to combat terrorism at the cost of socio-economic uplift of the downtrodden in the terror-infested region.

The core components of intersectionality are violated in Afghanistan by the Taliban regime through a multisectoral approach of systematic denial of rights to women and minorities, whereas in Pakistan, TTP employs a violent extremist strategy by targeting the Shiite Muslim minority and the state security institutions and infrastructure connected with the socio-economic wellbeing of the community. They seemingly pursue the dual aim of demoralising security forces and winning local support for the enforcement of TTP's brand of Islamic Emirate in former FATA and Swat regions, cleared from terrorism after a series of military operations at a high cost of sacrifice in terms of precious lives and economics. Although intersectionality's key concepts remain unchanged, their application is modified to suit local socio-political, ideological, and cultural nuances peculiar to the Afghanistan–Pakistan region.

Although scholars have attempted to explain race, class, and other groups by utilising intersectionality fundamentals, they have also accepted a plethora of theoretical, procedural, and policy questions under this concept of intersectionality (Ferree, 2018). This being a diverse and interdisciplinary subject, it encompasses a vast array of social, political, economic, ideological, and methodological micro and macro structures across the complex social arena. Ferree further argues that intersectionality is not merely a form of inquiry or critical analysis but "praxis that challenges inequalities and opens space" (Ferree, 2018) to politically tackle injustices and discrimination on multiple counts. However, another scholar, Giammarinaro (2022), has described the feminist angle by targeting women migrants who face sexual and other kinds of exploitation. With poor law and order and little economic opportunities, women are forced to work in undesirable environments and are often underpaid and exploited. Many of them are being sexually exploited in the rich Arab states due to their economic miseries and constraints. The inquiry aims at evaluating various factors that impact the local population irrespective of gender; however, the weaker component takes precedence in the analysis (Giammarinaro, 2022).

Yuval-Davis (2015) unveiled another dimension of intersectionality and exploitation by employing situated analysis with a view to explain the different inequalities including social, economic, political, cultural, class-driven inequalities, personal and community rights, and security: "Given its multiple and multi-disciplinary history, intersectionality is not a unified body of theory but more a range of theoretical and conceptual tools" (Yuval-Davis, 2015). However, intersectionality can be suitably juxtaposed with other theoretical paradigms, such as Marxism, neo-liberalism, feminism, let alone sociology (Yuval-Davis, 2015). Exploitation on multiple counts is a contested concept as there is no consensus on the definition of this term, especially legal exploitation of migrants and their rights in a host country. In this article, the focus will remain on political, economic, cultural, and ideological exploitation. This aspect of exploitation is pronounced in the case of Afghan minority communities which are discriminated on belief and race. The Taliban adopted some controversial rules regarding the rights of women, especially their right to education, and some human rights organisations also raised cases related to revenge from political and ethnic opponents and extra-judicial killings after the group came to power in Afghanistan (Shad & Shah, 2024).

## 2.2. Terror Activism of TTP

TTP, the offshoot of Afghan jihad compatriots in the 1980s and 1990s, has been a significant non-state actor in the region's landscape, particularly in the context of terrorism and insurgency in Pakistan since 2007. Numerous scholarly works have examined the origins, ideology, tactics, and impact of TTP's terror activism, but the violent return of TTP into Pakistan's terror scenario since 2021 is scarcely discussed in the existing literature. For instance, one article illustrates that although Pakistan made important efforts in combating terrorist activism, since 2021, when the Afghan Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, Pakistan has been facing another severe wave of terrorism (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023).

Exploring the current situation in the region, another author shows that the radicalisation trend has increased alarmingly in Pakistan since the Taliban's return to power, as it encouraged the TTP to increase its involvement in Pakistan (Basit, 2022). Additionally, a book titled *The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan–Afghanistan Frontier* highlights TTP's complex relationship with other militant groups, including Al-Qaeda, as well as its role in fomenting violence and extremism in the two countries' border areas (Basit, 2022). Overall, these scholarly works contribute to a deeper understanding of TTP's terror actions and their implications for normalcy and stability in the region. The literature exemplifies that the Afghanistan–Pakistan border area remains a sanctuary for various militant groups, including TTP, Al-Qaeda, and Islamic State Khorasan Province, and most of these groups concentrate on accomplishing their activities within South Asia, including Pakistan (Cordesman & Hwang, 2020).

The existing literature on the terrorism of TTP offers valuable insights into the group's origins, tactics, and impact on regional security. However, the limited focus on the impact of TTP's recruitment and violent activism on the political, military, human, and socio-economic factors in the aftermath of the Afghan Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan since 2021 is a noticeable gap in the current literature. The analysis of intersectionality strands would help make the study even more interesting for scholars because there is little academic work on the social, cultural, and ideological injustices faced by the communities due to differences in race, gender, and identity, especially in the region under discussion. Further exploration of these dynamics could enhance the understanding of the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism in Pakistan.

## 3. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The "security dilemma" in international politics is "a situation in which actions taken by a state to increase its security cause reactions from other states, which in turn lead to a decrease rather than an increase in the original state's security" (Wivel, n.d.). In essence, in the security dilemma, well-intentioned states contest for influence to enhance their security-related interests, but by such action, they reduce the safety of others (Montgomery, 2006). The theory of realism uses this concept of security dilemma, where measures assumed by one state to boost its security can unconsciously provoke insecurity in other states, leading to an arms race, conflict, instability, and mutual distrust. The prominent neorealist Kenneth Waltz assumes that in the anarchic condition of the world, where there is no common government, survival remains the main goal of states (Baylis & Smith, 2005). According to him, states suspect the objectives of other states, and therefore always seek to expand their safety measures. Another renowned scholar, Alexander Wendt, does not consider the security dilemma a result of anarchy or an outcome given by nature; according to him, a social structure consists of intersubjective considerations, where states are so doubtful that they falsely assume each other's intentions (Wendt, 1992). As both count power as a source of safety, they accumulate more and more power. Since the defensive ability will certainly cover some offensive aptitude, many of the measures adopted by one side for its security can frequently threaten or be perceived as aggressive.

Some scholars believe that the world is anarchic by nature, and that states' main concern is their survival in the anarchy of the international system, and for that, they increase their power to protect themselves from any threat. Robert Jarvis articulates that, as the world is anarchic, a state increases its military capability for its defence (Jervis, 1978). However, he believes that because states are not aware of each other's aims, other states may consider their defensive actions as offensive. In such a situation, the possibility of military competition could become stronger. Jervis believes that the technical capabilities of a state and its geographical position are two essential factors in determining whether offensive or defensive action is gainful for it. Charles L. Glaser, on the other hand, claims that Wendt misrepresented the "security dilemma" because "Wendt is using the 'security dilemma' to define the outcome of states' interactions, whereas Jervis and the literature he has developed focus on the material conditions states face, such as geography and prevailing technology" (Glaser, 1997, p. 171).

Attacks on the Pakistani interests by TTP backed by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and heavy air operations by Pakistan in Afghanistan can be understood in light of the "security dilemma" perspective of international relations, according to which one state takes more effective measures to protect its own security; a stronger response from another state increases the security difficulties of the first state. At first, the Taliban authority of Afghanistan supported the acts of their ideological parasitic group—TTP—in Pakistan for their own interests, but this situation resulted in the Afghan Taliban regime facing a military reaction from Pakistan, a militarily more powerful state in the region. Accordingly, it is surely understood that the non-cooperative attitude of the Taliban regime with Pakistan has been driven by a perceived security dilemma, where Pakistan's exertions to address TTP's threat on its territory are viewed with distrust by the Afghan Taliban authorities, fearing encroachment on their sovereignty.

The research employs a mixed method combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. They include historical and process tracing methods, comparative study, and explanatory analysis for the investigation of historical ties, diplomatic discourse between the two countries, and cross-border violent actions of TTP,

terrorist incidents, and related deaths. The authors used primary and secondary sources along with an examination of quantitative data of terror-related incidents to address the research question "How has the resurgence of TTP since 2021, coupled with the Afghan Taliban regime's apathy, impacted intersectional security strands and contributed to resultant injustices in Pakistan?" Some government reports, formal statements, and official letters are deemed as primary sources in this study. The secondary data available in the form of think tank reports, research articles, books, and official releases by the departments of the Government of Pakistan, such as the National Counterterrorism Authority, has been utilized in the inquiry.

## 4. Emerging Patterns of Terrorism: Resurgence of TTP in Pakistan Since 2021

TTP aims to establish a puritanical Islamic state in Pakistan through violent means, rejecting the legitimacy of the Pakistani state and its democratic institutions (Akhtar et al., 2023). The period from 2007 to 2014 witnessed ruthless activities of TTP including bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings targeting security forces, government officials, religious minorities, and common civilians in the different areas of Pakistan. In June 2014, the Pakistan Army, with thousands of troops in Waziristan and other areas of the country, launched a comprehensive operation named "Zarb-e-Azb" against TTP and other militant groups. Many of TTP's activists escaped to Afghanistan due to this military campaign, which was followed by another military manoeuvre named "Radd-ul-Fasaad" in 2017; but under a new operational plan, the militant group, TTP, started to use Afghanistan's soil as a safe haven for its attacks into Pakistan. Although TTP's attacks in Pakistan decreased from 2015 to 2020, the intensity of these brutalities has increased since then.

The years 2021 to 2024 witnessed a resurgence in TTP's violent activities as the group conducted numerous significant terrorist attacks across Pakistan, targeting security forces, civilians, and government installations. It is neither possible nor desirable to cover all the occurrences of violence in this study; however, the emerging pattern of terrorism substantiating the resurgence of TTP as a terrorist outfit should suffice. TTP stepped up its terror campaign in 2021 by staging high-profile attacks and killing police officials and military personnel from April 2021 until now. Pakistan conveyed its serious concerns to the Afghan authorities about the increased intensity of attacks at the beginning of the second half of 2024 because, in a daring assault, TTP attacked the military cantonment in Bannu (KPK Province) in the vicinity of South Waziristan, claiming dozens of lives in July 2024 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b). It was a strong message that TTP could make even very secure compounds vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

According to the reports published, TTP mostly targets the Pakistani security forces, as in 2021 the group carried out 282 terror attacks, resulting in the killing of 509 security men and the wounding of 463 others, and in 2022 it executed 367 terror attacks, killing and wounding 1,015 security personnel (Ansari, 2024). In mid-2023, the media verified that Pakistan had seen an upsurge of 73% in terror attacks and a 138% rise in deaths due to terrorist occurrences in the country from August 2021 to April 2023 (Firdous et al., 2023; Missal, 2023; "Shootout between Pakistani troops and insurgents," 2023). The next six months of 2023 also witnessed further TTP attacks on the Pakistani security forces ("Six Pakistan soldiers killed," 2023). Another report published in December 2023 by a Pakistani research institute proclaimed that the first 11 months of the year (2023) witnessed 664 attacks in the country, an increase of 67% in comparison to the same period in the previous year (Hussain, 2023b).

The year 2024 has been even more destructive as the increasing TTP attacks on Pakistan strained Pakistan–Afghanistan relations further ("Two army officers," 2024). The escalation led to an exchange of fire between Afghan and Pakistani security forces, plaguing the bilateral relations even further ("Taliban says it hit back," 2024). During this year (2024), TTP also selected a strategic target by killing five Chinese workers and their Pakistani driver in a suicide bomb blast in the Northwest locality of Bisham in Pakistan on March 26, 2024. Chinese nationals were deliberately targeted to harm Pakistan's strategic interests and force China to react. Although relations were not severed, China strongly protested the killing of its nationals and slowed down work on a significant hydropower project on the Indus River in the Gilgit-Baltistan region (Saifi & Gan, 2024).

## 5. Afghan Taliban Regime's Apathy

This part of the article specifically aims at exploring the Afghan Taliban regime's indifference to or deliberate ignoring of TTP while it uses Afghanistan's territory for violent activities in Pakistan. The conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan is nothing new in the history of their bilateral relations. Ever since the creation of Pakistan, there have been various ups and downs between the two countries. Pakistan felt offended because it was initially not accepted as an independent state by Afghanistan which opposed the creation of Pakistan as an independent state in the UN. Thus, Afghanistan and Pakistan, despite ethno-linguistic and religious linkages, have had strained relations since 1947, the year Pakistan was officially established. In spite of the 1893 Durand Line agreement between the British Empire and King Abdur Rehman of Afghanistan, the issue of "Pashtunistan" had been haunting the relations between both countries.

It was a sort of delusion on the part of the Afghan ruling elite that Pashtuns on both sides of the divide could be united into a province being carved out of Pashtun-dominated belts in the KPK and Balochistan province of Pakistan. The Afghan jihad of the 1980s and 1990s added fuel to the fire of mistrust between the two countries (Durani & Khan, 2009). Scholars have described a trend of mutual misreading and misunderstanding between the two states as cognitive dissonance over the understanding of the concept of a modern nation-state (Baqai & Wasi, 2021, pp. 6–7). Although the Afghan Taliban's rule was initially a hope for better relations between the two sides, this era did not prove to be conducive to such. After 9/11, the bond between TTP and the Afghan Taliban was further cemented; the Afghan Taliban acted as TTP's mentor for achieving strategic objectives against the US-led forces in Afghanistan. Then, the Afghan Taliban looked the other way and facilitated terrorist strikes by TTP inside Pakistan due to the ideological lineage of the ultra-conservative leadership of the Afghan Taliban (Felbab-Brown, 2023). Since TTP had been supporting the Afghan Taliban against the US, terrorist activities by TTP were condoned by the Taliban regime after seizing power in Kabul in 2021. The Afghan Taliban did not regard Pakistan's security concerns and did nothing to prevent TTP's reorganisation and intensified attacks against the Pakistani security forces (Shinn & Dobbins, 2011).

The political disagreement between the Afghan regime and Pakistan's government was pronounced when the head of Pakistani caretaker setup Anwaar ul Haq Kakar asserted that the Afghan government was not preventing TTP from managing acts of terrorism in Pakistan (Raza, 2023). The new militant faction Tehrik-e-Jihad Pakistan, Baloch separatist groups, and Islamic State Khorasan Province are also to blame for this mayhem (Gul, 2023a). These terrorist organizations, including TTP, frequently collude and engage targets inside Pakistani territory and flee to their sanctuaries in Afghanistan with impunity (Center for

Preventive Action, 2023). Afghanistan is quickly turning into a breeding ground for international terrorism, threatening regional countries and radiating threats to the international community. Pakistan cannot successfully fight either TTP or foreign terrorist entities hiding in Afghanistan on its own. The role of regional stakeholders and major global players is critical in pressuring the Afghan Taliban to rein in TTP and prevent the use of Afghan soil by this group or any other terrorist entity.

## 6. Threats to Intersectional Security Strands and Resultant Injustices

The concept of intersectionality denotes the interaction of social identity constructions such as race, class, and gender with life practices, especially experiences of opportunity and challenge (Gopaldas, 2013). The strands of intersectional security encompass a wide range of interconnected issues that affect human security, societal well-being, and regional and global stability. In this study, the concept has been employed to evaluate the injustices deliberately meted out to communities living on both sides of the Afghanistan–Pakistan border. Factually, women and religious minorities are the losers and major victims. Paradoxically, a closer examination of the issue reveals it to be a problem of racial and ethnic exploitation, and of the denial of various rights based on the same discrimination and marginalization. If the disparity and extreme injustices are highlighted, the governments may be sensitized on this oft-neglected aspect of the world and consider remedial measures like enacting laws and raising structures that ensure equal rights irrespective of race, gender, and religious identity.

Ethnicity and religious belief are very pronounced elements in one's identity construction given the peculiar security, social, and cultural/religious milieu prevailing in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. In broad academic debate, intersectionality is generally accepted as a theory or paradigm in feminist studies that was introduced to project and protect the social and political rights of black women in the US; scholars have debated whether it should be exclusively a part of feminist rights (Al-Faham et al., 2019) at the cost of a much-desired diversified application of the term to protect the rights of other sexual identities, representing vulnerable races or ethnic affiliations, or broadened to cover all marginalized communities irrespective of sex.

Perceptibly, the literature and scholars' perspective do not prohibit wider application of this concept either in a society that discriminates fellow citizens on race/ethnicity or gender/belief, or in conflicts such as the one under discussion—terrorism—which worsens the already precarious condition of women and minorities, reeling under highly paranoid social/cultural/ideological traditions. Al-Faham gave a broader explanation of the concept of intersectionality that is applied in this study because it covers the aspects being highlighted in the research:

> Various applications of intersectionality [can be made] across a range of topics, including reproductive rights, colonization, religion, immigration, and political behavior. We organize this scholarship into two broad areas: research that focuses on uncovering processes of differentiation and systems of marginalization and research that focuses on categories of difference and between-category relationships. (Al-Faham et al., 2019, p. 252)

Grounding the intersectionality concept with theoretical foundations and operationalisation aligns with the hypothesis; in this inquiry, intersectionality as a framework of analysis has been employed to evaluate multifarious exploitations being meted out to the individuals and communities residing in the troubled Afghanistan–Pakistan region. Understandably, exploitation is a contested term with vague legal

interpretations; however, the focus of the debate revolves around measurable political, economic, cultural, and ideological exploitations of weaker communities with primary emphasis on factors such as race, gender, and class on both sides of the division. Women and religious minorities are facing the brunt of injustices and discrimination due to the obscurantist ideology of extremist forces or the denial of socio-political and economic rights under a misconstrued interpretation of religious obligations. The individuals and communities living along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border are oppressed to such an extent that, in many cases, even if they wish to break free from cultural exploitation and injustices and challenge the denial of their rights—especially women's—through extreme interpretations of religious beliefs by extremist forces, their pleas are not heeded.

Since the security dilemma is the product of structural realism, Pakistan's foreign policy initiatives and (scarce) reciprocity from the Afghanistan side need to be embedded into the debate. Pakistan had long been lobbying in favour of the Afghan Taliban being the dominant force and the beneficiary of the US–Afghan Taliban conflict with muted hopes that the Afghan Taliban would establish good relations with the State of Pakistan and would help curtail terrorist groups operating from Afghan soil. The much-desired reconciliation between the Afghan regime and the government of Pakistan would have facilitated in paving the way for the social inclusion of oppressed communities and the building of social structures helpful both for women's empowerment and the safeguarding of minorities' rights. Disappointingly, yet not bizarrely, the Taliban did the opposite and turned a blind eye to TTP and its affiliates on Afghan soil.

The Afghan regime being a sympathiser of TTP and ideologically averse to women's emancipation and the social inclusion of minorities resisted the change in status quo. Conversely, the Pakistani government merged the former troubled districts of FATA into the mainstream of provincial governance under a constitutional framework for ensuring the rule of law and equitable progress. However, extremist forces hijacked the entire system through terrorism and coercion, impeding the government's efforts. Three distinct features—race, gender, and ideology (religious belief)—are being exploited by the either state institutions of the Afghan regime or TTP, an ultra-extremist entity struggling to impose their so-called emirate in the same region (inside Pakistani territory).

Anarchy and international structures have been at play in this region since the era of the "Great Game" (Czarist Empire vs. British Empire) until the recent US-led War on Terror. Scholars have described intersectionality as a tool to analyse various dynamics of power and to trace structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal underpinnings (Liu, 2017), thus widening the scope for researchers and practitioners from state- to regional- and systemic-level analysis. The region under review is a typical example of a region that has always experienced some kind of extra-regional influence or interference. Therefore, the current research article encompasses analysis from individual state(s) to regional dynamics and systemic constraints preventing a meaningful inclusion of communities. Terrorism is a securitised phenomenon and is seen by various states differently with a view to extracting political mileage. The region under review is no exception; the role of regional stakeholders and international players is critical in enduring peace and in efforts for social inclusion. In Pakistan, the pervasive impact of terrorism exceeds immediate violent events, undermining the grounds of peace and social inclusion by threatening political stability, military formation, economic development, human security, and cultural integrity.

### 6.1. Political Security

Political security means political organisational stability, smooth governance, and implementation of the ideologies that give legitimacy and a guarantee of sovereignty to governments and states (Black Trident, 2020). According to research, it is the poor's stakes in political policy formulation, so that they benefit and become stakeholders (OECD, 2007, Chapter 4). The resumption of TTP and other militants' attacks badly influenced the smooth political and democratic process in areas affected by terrorism. For example, it was reported in the media that TTP threatened to attack the leaders of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and Pakistan People's Party, the two political factions in the country in January 2023 (Gul, 2023a). Moreover, as for the parliamentary elections of February 2024, a TTP-affiliated militant group had vowed to sabotage the polling process in the country, particularly the tribal region adjacent to Afghanistan's borders (Farooq, 2024). Terrorising citizens and deterring them from participating in the political process amount to the denial of their political rights at the cost of their voices being heard in power corridors.

### 6.2. Military Security

Military security can be defined under the traditional definition of national security which is often considered as the ability of a nation to organise its military to protect its borders from any external threat or aggression by any state or non-state actors (Government of Spain, 2013). Although, in the simple description, military security implies the capability of a state to protect itself from aggression, the military could also be called in to assist police and other law enforcement agencies in tackling internal threats, including dealing with terrorism, if the threat is beyond the capacity of the police. This is common in every country; in Pakistan, it has become a norm since 9/11 to deploy the military in volatile regions of the Afghanistan–Pakistan's border to combat terrorist entities, especially TTP. The TTP, assisted by the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda, is a battle-hardened terrorist outfit. The addition of fighters from Central Asian republics and US weapons procured from Afghanistan have further complicated counterterrorist operations by the Pakistan's military (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, n.d.). The casualty toll in Pakistan has escalated much higher than expected, especially after a series of military operations, to the chagrin of political and military leadership (Gul, 2024). Here military is not only being employed to defeat terrorism, but it is also ensuring security for all irrespective of gender and belief; therefore, by default intersectionality factors are being taken care of.

### 6.3. Economic Security

Economic security is the ability of individuals, households, or communities to cover their essential needs sustainably and with dignity (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2015). As national security considerations are inextricably tied to economic issues (Dezenski & Rader, 2024), economic security is, thus, taken as an essential part of national security. Economic vulnerabilities intersect with other insecurity strands, contributing to social unrest, conflict, and instability (Bellamy, 2020, Section 5.4.2). FAO has defined food security linked with economics as "when all people in any times [sic], have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food" (FAO, 2008, as cited in Pourreza et al., 2008, p. 113). Protracted military operations in Pakistan drain much-needed funds for economic development, and federal/provincial governments had to divert funds for security actually allocated for socio-economic uplift. Higher security expenditures influence economic security, and the region under review is enduring long

military operations wherein civilian houses, businesses, and public sector infrastructure were destroyed. Rather than rebuilding destroyed social support infrastructure and assisting civilians in restarting their businesses, the meagre resources are funnelled to costly military operations causing economic injustices (Abbasi, 2013). The resurrection of TTP violence again creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity, eroding investor confidence and deterring foreign investment in Pakistan. Even a Pakistani minister called the assaults on Chinese nationals in Pakistan a major setback for the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, saying, "The attacks created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, which is not conducive to investment" (Asfandiyar, 2023).

### 6.4. Human Security

The concept of security studies is an Anglo-American invention in the post-World War II time frame, as it was explained by Paul D. Williams in his book *Security Studies: An Introduction* while elucidating the background and the ambit of security, encompassing all its aspects (Williams, 2008, p. 3). Since personal security is part of human security, an individual irrespective of gender must feel protected at home, workplace, or place of worship and enjoy the liberty to practice one's traditions, norms, and values under free will. An Islamabad-based research centre testified severe threats to human security by reporting that at least 1,524 violence-related casualties and 1,463 injuries in 789 terror attacks and counter-terror operations were recorded in Pakistan in 2023 alone ("Terrorism-related deaths in Pakistan," 2024). Community security, which is also another dimension of human security, covers security concerns impacting a group of people or community. In Pakistan, some of the marginal communities feel vulnerable as they are occasionally attacked by extremist and terrorist groups. The issue of protection of the Hazara Shiite Muslim community is the obvious example of community security wherein this entire community is targeted and mistreated by violent extremists. Threats to human security could be established by the assessment of a report by the Center for Research and Security Studies (n.d.) revealing that, merely in 2023, terrorist activities directed at religious groups and their worship places resulted in the loss of 203 lives, 88 of them being security personnel.

### 6.5. Cultural Security

Cultural security is an aspect of security that ensures the unique cultural needs and distinctions of all individuals and groups (University of Notre Dame Australia, n.d.). Therefore, cultural insecurity or threats to cultural security encompass social inequalities, discrimination, and social and cultural injustice. Similarly, socio-cultural marginalisation undermines human values and societal cohesion. Thus, cultural insecurity intersects with economic, environmental, and political factors, contributing to tensions, instability, and violence within societies. Discussing the impact of violent extremism committed by religious militants on Pakistani culture, a piece of a scholarly work outlines that the aggressive competition between contending traditional and religious elements and their aggressive behaviour has made the country hostage to religious intolerance and violence (Hashmi, 2016). Another section of academic work describes how the cultural values of Pakistani society were affected basically through the Islamisation of the country and the Afghan jihad in the 1970s—but religious extremists posed more threats to the cultural security of the state in the post-9/11 and post-Arab Spring eras (Shah, 2022). The literature testifies that militancy has deeply impacted culture, customs, values, and the traditional religious character in former FATA (Khan et al., 2019). TTP's extremist ideology promotes divisions in society and cultural intolerance and desires to impose its rigid interpretations of Islamic law, which can suppress cultural diversity, restrict freedom of expression, and

undermine pluralism in Pakistani society. TTP's attacks on the tribal areas of Pakistan between 2021 and 2024 have also had significant impacts on the cultural values, social inclusion, and cultural integration of these regions.

## 7. Conclusion

Since the Afghan Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 2021, TTP's attacks in Pakistan have been adversely affecting various strands of security, including political, military, economic, and human and cultural.

As for *political security*, after ending its ceasefire with Pakistan's government in November 2022, TTP and its associates restarted targeting members and interests of the political parties, posing a very big threat to the political system of the country, in order to impose their brand of the religious political arrangement across Pakistan (Pandya, 2024). TTP's militants have not only threatened the security of the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, but their activities have also damaged the relations between the two countries. TTP's terrorist offensives against Chinese nationals working in Pakistan have also drawn a strong reaction from China. This study shows that the post-2021 timeframe is marred with political instability and poor governance both at the federal and provincial levels, providing a fertile base for TTP recruitment, fundraising, and operational planning. TTP exploited governance gaps, corruption, and lawlessness to establish footholds in remote areas and expand its influence in other areas.

The *military aspect of security*, which refers to the protection of a nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and military forces from external and internal threats, has been affected by TTP's attacks on the military forces and their installations. The attacks, particularly on the defence's facilities, undermine the perceived invulnerability of the armed forces. This can embolden terrorist groups and weaken the deterrence value of the military, making the country more vulnerable to further attacks. The persistent threat of TTP's attacks forces Pakistan to prioritize internal security over broader strategic goals. This shift in tactical orientation can limit the military's ability to engage in regional or global defense initiatives, thereby affecting the country's overall strategic posture. No one can deny the fact that the repeated TTP's attacks can erode public confidence in the military's ability to protect the country.

The country's *economic security*, which assures stable fiscal assets, employment, and access to monetary resources necessary for the population's well-being, ensuring protection from economic crises and vulnerabilities, has been severely disrupted by TTP's attacks in Pakistan, especially in the tribal areas neighbouring Afghanistan. The constant threat of violence has deterred investment and development projects, while also damaging infrastructure such as roads, markets, and other communication networks. These disruptions have stifled local businesses, reduced employment opportunities, and increased poverty levels in the affected regions. The attacks have also caused displacement of populations, further straining local economies and exacerbating economic insecurity. Additionally, the heightened security expenses and the diversion of government funds towards counterterrorism efforts have drained the required resources available for economic growth and social services, deepening the economic challenges faced by these regions.

As for personal security as a part of *human security*, the study has substantiated the terrorism-induced security dilemma for the State of Pakistan and a sense of insecurity for citizens living in bordering regions, especially those who are affected either due to terrorist activities or the collateral damage as a result of

military operations against TTP in this region. Besides suicide attacks and bomb blasts, the civilians had been victims of planted improvised explosive devices and systematic demolition of educational institutions and health facilities. The targeted individuals comprise two categories: one includes those who support the state's counterterrorism operations and advocate a peaceful struggle for legitimate constitutional rights; the second includes those who are neutral in the conflict, yet are eliminated due to sectarian differences or racial discrimination. Injustices on account of race, gender, and ideology stand proven because the Hazara Shiite community in particular and the Shiite community in general in Pakistan—which falls under the domain of the community aspect of the human dimension of security—remain the terrorists' prime sectarian target, to terrorize locals and settle their self-proclaimed religious belief-driven scores.

The resurgence of TTP poses significant threats to *cultural security*, social-cultural diversity, religious tolerance, gender equality, and social cohesion in Pakistan, specifically the border regions of the country. As regards gender discrimination, women are exceptionally marginalized in the affected regions; they have no freedom even to visit the market, let alone imagine their right to work and seek higher education. They are brutalised and traumatised to live in a siege. Ideology and local traditions are intermingled in the tribal society and both leverages are utilized by the terrorists to further their political and ideological objectives. Uneducated and unemployed youth is TTP's recruitment pool, in addition to enlistment from a few religious seminaries which act as the militant group's power bayonet to bolster its combat potential and reinforce political influence to negotiate with the government.

The tacit approval of all TTP's terrorist activities by the Afghan Taliban regime emboldens the militant group and complicates Pakistan's counterterrorism operations. The study has also concluded that TTP has utilized terrorism as a tool to coerce locals, irrespective of gender, to further its political, religious, and cultural interests for multifarious exploitations. Although TTP justifies its attacks as retaliation against the Pakistani security forces for counterterrorism manoeuvres, drone strikes, and military offensives targeting its leadership and infrastructure, the support it receives from the Afghan Taliban due to the bilateral ideological convergence plays an important role in this context. Once again, Afghanistan is fast turning into a breeding ground for international terrorism, threatening regional countries and radiating threats to the international community. Considering all these circumstances, it is necessary for the Afghan Taliban to give up their support to TTP and cooperate with Pakistan for regional harmony, community rights, and contributing towards international peace and security. The regional players and major powers should play their role in defeating the terror monster which could transcend borders if allowed to further flourish.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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## About the Authors

**Syed Sibtain Hussain Shah** (PhD) is an expert in security studies, with a focus on national security, religious extremism, and counterterrorism. He worked as an assistant professor of international relations at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, and as head of the School of Political Science of the Minhaj University Lahore. He obtained his PhD in political science from the University of Warsaw (2020). He also holds an MPhil degree in international relations from the National Defence University Islamabad (2015). He is the author of multiple research articles and book chapters.

**Arshad Mahmood** (PhD) is an assistant professor at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (NIPCONS), National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad. He holds a PhD degree in international relations from National Defence University, Islamabad. He is a seasoned practitioner in the fields of security and strategic studies. His areas of expertise are extremism/terrorism and counterterrorism strategies, besides peace and conflict studies and strategic policy planning. As a former military officer, he has served in national strategic intelligence and strategic plans divisions under the Ministry of Defence of Pakistan.

**Muhammad Kamran** (PhD) earned his PhD in management and quality sciences from the Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw, Poland. He has more than 15 years of teaching and administrative experience in academia. He is working as an assistant professor at the Faculty of Management, Collegium Civitas, Warsaw, Poland, and has taught multiple courses at the bachelor and master levels. He is the author of multiple book chapters and international scientific publications.