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<b>Article:</b>	<b>The Reemergence of the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan and Its Impact on Militant Groups in Pakistan (A Case Study of the TTP)</b>
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### **ABSTRACT**

This research work attempts to investigate the militant groups' activities against Pakistan after the re-emergence of the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan. The core objective of this research is to highlight the security threats that have emerged as challenges to Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Pakistan perceived that the Taliban coming into power would reduce terrorist threats to Pakistan. However, after the Taliban took power, Pakistan faced a new wave of militancy, with the TTP in particular becoming a major security concern. The research findings disclosed that the Taliban interim government in Afghanistan encouraged militant groups like the TTP, BLA and IS-K based in Afghanistan to engage in disruptive activities against Pakistan. A qualitative research approach was applied to this study, in which the primary data was collected through personal interviews and the secondary data was collected through published sources. A non-probability judgmental sampling technique through a semi-structured interview was conducted. Moreover, the study recommends that the threat to peace in Afghanistan persists and will have repercussions for Pakistan's stability in the future. However, if the Afghan Taliban interim government addresses the legitimate concerns of their neighbouring states, it can bring peace and stability to the region.

**Keywords:** Afghan Taliban, TTP, BLA, IS-K, Terrorism and Militancy

**Introduction:**

Pakistan shares about 2400 kilometres of the border with Afghanistan, which is known as the Durand Line. On November 12, 1893, it was demarcated during British rule in India. Amir Abdurrahman, king of Afghanistan and Lord Mortimore from British India were the signatories for both parties. This border was repeatedly endorsed by both parties on several occasions. However, after the partition of India in 1947, Afghanistan refused recognition of Pakistan in the UN on the issue of the Durand Line. Its stance is that this agreement was signed under duress with British authorities. On the other hand, Pakistan considers this border legitimate, having inherited it from the British (Yousafzai, 2017).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 brought the Af-Pak region to the limelight. As a result, the US started a war against the Soviet Union. Pakistan also joined this war and the US against the former Soviet Union. In April 1988, under the Geneva accord, the Soviet Union left Afghanistan. Following the Soviet withdrawal, there was a struggle for supremacy over a number of groups among various factions (Jan, 2022).

Eventually, in the Afghan province of Kandahar, certain Muslim clerics, largely from rural areas of Pashtun descent, founded the Taliban Movement in the middle of the final decade of the twentieth century. Taliban is the plural form of Talib, which refers to madrassa pupils. The majority of this movement's members were former Mujahedeen who fought against the Soviets (Ahmed, 2000). In southern Afghanistan, a sociopolitical crisis gave rise to the Taliban. They had very little money at first, but later on, the province of Kandhar's goods carriers helped them out financially. The Jirga system was used by the Taliban to deliver quick justice to their community's lower classes and this was their main cause of popularity among the people. Finally, after several years of fight among the Mujahedeen, the Taliban finally succeeded in establishing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under Mullah Umar in 1996 (Thomas, 2021). The Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union and then the Taliban government attracted many militant organisations towards Afghanistan, particularly from the Middle East, including Al-Qaida. Later on, Al-Qaida started involving in militant activities, mostly directed towards the West. In 1998, it assaulted US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The 9/11 attacks, on the other hand, sparked the Global War on Terror (WOT) ((Gunaratana& Iqbal, 2011).

As a result of the 9/11 attacks, the US started Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in October 2001 against the Al-Qaida outfits in Afghanistan. Pakistan also joined this war against terrorism through Hobson's selection: "either join us or be ready to become our enemy." The OEF directed the militant outfits towards the FATA tribal region of Pakistan in search of a shelter. Consequently, FATA becomes a sanctuary for militants. The klashonkove culture, as well as the presence of like-minded militants, created a favourable environment for these militant outfits in FATA. Hereafter, FATA became the epicentre of global Terrorism and many small groups of local militants emerged (Naseer, 2016).

In December 2007, these small militant groups banded together under the banner of Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP), led by Baitullah Mehsud. Later on, the TTP started clandestine activities against the state of Pakistan and targeted the common masses and law enforcement personnel. It is widely assumed that the TTP initially restricted their disruptive activities in Afghanistan to the US army, but later began militant activities against Pakistan. As a result, the erstwhile FATA and particularly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province came under

the shadow of an extreme wave of militancy and resultantly, about eighty-three thousand Pakistani citizens lost their lives in this War on Terror (WoT) (Jan, 2019).

As a result of these militant activities, the government of Pakistan launched a series of military operations against these militant outfits. The Operation Zarbe Azab proved to be a massive blow to them. The then-DG ISPR of the Pakistan Army claimed that militants had been completely eradicated from the FATA region (Javed, 2015).

The regional countries and particularly Pakistan, realized that peace in Afghanistan was essential for the peace of the entire region. Pakistan, along with regional and major powers, initiated peace efforts in Afghanistan. Pakistan, as the country most affected by the longevity of war, has begun practical efforts in this regard. In July 2015, Pakistan arranged peace talks between the US and Afghan Taliban in Murree. In 2016, Pakistan's efforts again brought fruitful results by arranging Quadrilateral Coordination Talks. It was followed by Six Nations Talks in 2017 in Moscow and finally, as a result of these efforts, an agreement was reached between the US and Afghan Taliban in Doha, Qatar, on February 29, 2020. In this agreement, the US agreed to a complete withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Taliban also showed positive gestures and agreed to cease fire. On August 15, 2021, the US withdrew its forces as agreed in the truce (Jan, 2022).

As a result, the Taliban took power and declared that Afghan soil would not be used against any state. They also promised to provide human and particularly, women's rights to their citizens. Pakistan perceived that the Taliban government would help them to tackle the TTP problem; however, after the Taliban came into power, the militant activities of the TTP further intensified. On the other hand, the Afghan Taliban don't want to punish terrorist groups, especially the TTP, in any way.

### **Literature Review**

Griffin (2000) provides a comprehensive Afghanistan's Taliban movement's history during the last decade of the twentieth century. He has expertise working with humanitarian relief organisations and has the know-how of a long history in Afghanistan. He sheds light on Afghanistan's past under Taliban rule. In his writing, the information and interpretation vary from one group to another and are inconsistent. Griffin is of the view that Pakistan's contribution to the Taliban movement's victory in Afghanistan throughout the 1990s was relatively minimal. His arguments in favour of Iran are even worse (Griffin, 2000).

Hussain (2008) concentrated on the religious radicals responsible for Pakistan's development into a society of biased extremism. He has talked about how important Pakistan is to the U.S. in terms of both the War on Terror and the conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Hussain disagrees with the perception that the US was totally dependent on ISI during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan for the supply of weaponry, giving ISI total command over operations in Afghanistan and enabling it to be effective. It was anticipated that the war in Afghanistan would be a component of the global Jihad against communism. According to the author, Zia-ul-Haq used Islam to give legitimacy to his illegitimate government, which supported the US in this war. He further supports his idea by saying that as the Soviets left Afghanistan in 1988, the US lost interest in Pakistan (Hussain, 2006).

Khuram Iqbal and Rohan Gunaratna (2012) are of the view that Musharraf's choice to support the US in the WOT turned the Taliban from "blue-eyed" assets to Pakistan's enemies,

causing the WOT to extend to Pakistan's settled areas as well. The authors further highlight that many militant organisations launch terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and other countries using Pakistani land, particularly the FATA region and therefore, the writers coined Pakistan as a refuge for terrorists. The threat of terrorism won't be adequately reduced by driving Al-Qaeda out of the tribal region. Instead, the authors argue that any initial response to this threat must take into account the many factors at play and address the years of bad governance, illiteracy, poverty, poor health care, and corruption that led to the formation of bases that supported ideological radicalization and terrorism (Gunaratna & Iqbal, 2011).

Rashid (2006) provides a historical, psychological, military, and religious overview of the Taliban, a radicalised Pashtun group. This book covers all the significant Afghan leaders from 1979 to 1999. The book goes into detail about the Taliban's ascent to power between 1994 and 1999. It draws attention to their social background, attitudes, and behaviours, as well as how poorly they treated women when in power. Even Osama bin Laden is covered in a chapter. Rashid illuminates the conflict between powerful and smaller nations over control of Afghanistan, highlighting not only the US, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran but also Central Asian powers. The book's appendices provide information about the Taliban leadership's background, including their age, tribal affiliation, and level of schooling. It draws attention to the Taliban's Pashtun roots, their intense animosity towards Shiites, and their well-organized heroin trade (Rashid, 2006).

### **Statement of the Problem**

After the long-term impact of the War on Terror, Pakistan realised that peace in Afghanistan was important for peace in Pakistan and the entire region. It started working for reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan made every effort to facilitate reconciliation between the Taliban and the US. Consequently, both parties finally reached an agreement on February 29, 2020. The US withdrew foreign troops from Afghanistan and on August 15, 2021, the Taliban established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Initially, it was believed by Pakistan that gaining power in Afghanistan would put an end to the TTP issue for Pakistan; however, security threats and challenges in Pakistan further intensified. The TTP, based in Afghanistan, was a major threat to peace in Pakistan. However, the Afghan Taliban were reluctant to take any action against them. The main purpose of this research is to address the security threats posed by the TTP to Pakistan following the Taliban's re-emergence in Afghanistan.

### **Research Questions**

1. Why did Pakistan negotiate with the TTP, which poses a long-term security threat to it? s
2. What are the security threats to Pakistan from the TTP?

### **Research Methodology**

A qualitative research approach is applied to this study. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized in this research to properly answer the above-mentioned research questions. Secondary data were obtained from published sources like books, research articles, and M.Phil. and Ph.D. theses related to the topic. Primary data was collected through a semi-structured interview schedule from experts related to the topic using a non-probability purposive sampling technique.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

Pakistan's internal security is linked with peace and stability in Afghanistan. After the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan's important security issue was the poorly maintained Pak-Afghan border, which allowed for the easy passage of militant and extremist groups. One of the journalists disclosed that the Pakistani establishment was against the Taliban's full control of Afghanistan as they considered that doing so would boost the TTP. The TTP, in turn, would increase disruptive actions inside Pakistan. He further explained that Pakistan was conscious of the TTP's past organisational and ideological connections with the Afghan Taliban leadership, which might give the TTP the power to conduct cross-border disruptive activities against Pakistan (Khan, personal interview, July 8, 2022).

### **The Taliban's Rise to Power and TTP Threat to Pakistan**

A year after its formation in December 2007, the TTP was blacklisted in Pakistan. The terrorist group was responsible for multiple attacks within Pakistan, including the 2014 massacre at the Army Public School in Peshawar, in which 149 people, including 132 kids, were massacred. One of the TTP's top leaders admitted during recent peace talks that the school attack was their worst mistake. It has a lengthy history of terrorist attacks on Pakistani government institutions and civilians. The Pakistani military also conducted a series of military operations against them in the erstwhile FATA. As a result of these operations, the TTP somehow reduced its activities.

However, after the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in August 2021, TTP insurgent activities against Pakistan ramped up. They expanded their presence in Pakistan by launching a series of militant strikes against Pakistani security forces as well as the general population. By reuniting previously disparate factions and bolstering internal coherence, the insurgents have demonstrated renewed political strength. In addition, Al Qaeda seemed to indicate that it would continue to work with the TTP. Pakistan's interior minister put out a terror notice after the TTP attacked the police in Islamabad.

The US occupation of Afghanistan, support from the Afghan government and the Indian factor have long been perceived by the Pakistani government as the causes of the TTP establishment. Pakistan believed that the TTP's threat would decrease after the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan. However, the Afghan Taliban's rise to power has further intensified the TTP threat to Pakistan (Mir, 2022).

Bangash, a journalist in Islamabad, claims that the haste with which the Afghan Taliban have grabbed power predicts adversely for Pakistan. The success of the Afghan Taliban has given the TTP and other terrorist groups in Pakistan more confidence. Even inactive groups of militants have been reactivated against Pakistan. He further said that a number of key TTP leaders, including Faqir Muhammad, were released after the Afghan Taliban seized control of Afghanistan. In eastern Afghanistan, car rallies and caravans were held to commemorate the release of the TTP militants. The TTP expressed its entire commitment to the Afghan Taliban and congratulated them on regaining control. The Afghan Taliban's victory further strengthened the TTP's confidence. Consequently, the TTP claimed credit for numerous terrorist strikes against Pakistan a short time after the Taliban came to power (Bangash, interview, July 8, 2022). Another factor that encouraged the TTP, according to another expert, was the fact that a number of Pakistani political figures openly praised the Taliban's ascent to power in Afghanistan, referring to it as a "political victory" (Khan, interview, July 8, 2022).

According to a report by the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), there were 208 militant attacks carried out in Pakistan in 2021, which is almost a 42.5% increase compared to attacks in 2020. As a result of these attacks, about 335 Pakistani civilians lost their lives. Out of the above-mentioned attacks, the TTP took responsibility for 87 attacks (PIPS, 2021). On the other hand, the TTP also claimed responsibility for about 284 attacks against the personnel of Pakistani law enforcement agencies in November 2021. Additionally, the TTP killed around 79 members of the security forces in the first quarter of 2022 (Basit, 2022).

### **Peace Talks between Pakistan and the TTP**

In the past, negotiations between the government of Pakistan and the TTP resulted in a number of agreements. When Naik Mohammad was the Taliban leader in South Waziristan in 2004, the first agreement was signed. Moreover, the Pakistani government contacted the Taliban directly in several tribal regions and reached accords with militants. The third significant settlement took place in Malakand in 2009 and led to the adoption of numerous judicial and administrative reforms. It is important to mention here that none of the previous agreements with militants has succeeded in bringing about stability in Pakistan, especially in the former FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regions.

The TTP and the Pakistani government have been pursuing the latest peace process since October 2021. In an interview with a TV network in October, Imran Khan, leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Party and former Prime Minister of Pakistan, said for the first time that his government was in contact with the TTP for peace negotiations. He claimed that "there were numerous organisations that made up the TTP, and some of them wanted peace negotiations with our administration." He went on to say that this was an effort to achieve peace through reconciliation (Gul, 2022).

The opposition parties in the parliament criticized these peace talks. Even though, Shah Mehmood Quraishi the Foreign Minister had earlier intimated in a press conference that Pakistan could give forgiveness TTP militants if they put down their weapons and abided by the Pakistani constitution (Ahmed, Personal Communication, July 8, 2022), Imran Khan, the head of the PTI and former prime minister of Pakistan, has long supported a negotiated agreement with the Taliban. Even when militant activity was at its height and he was the head of the opposition, he insisted repeatedly that talks with militant organisations were necessary. Mubarak asserted that the Afghan Taliban had arranged these peace negotiations and Sirajuddin Haqqani, the interior minister for the Taliban, served as the mediator between the two sides.

The TTP announced a temporary ceasefire in November 2021 for one month. The two main goals of the TTP in the peace negotiations were the implementation of Shariah in Pakistan and the release of its key leaders who were already in Pakistani jails. However, these negotiations initially failed as the above-mentioned conditions were not acceptable to Pakistan. The TTP ended in December 2021 with the ceasefire and restarted terrorist activities against Pakistan (Mubarak, Personal interview, August 08, 2022).

Some critics in Pakistan consider that such negotiations ought to happen, while others consider that they ought to be avoided entirely. Those who supported these peace negotiations believed that, for peace, these negotiations must be held. Mubarak asserted that as the TTP's continued existence poses a serious threat to Pakistan's long-term peace, talks should be held with them. Peace talks are opposed by those who believe that doing so would increase terrorism

by other militant groups in Pakistan. Bangash supports providing this option to terrorism victims and their families. The government should use this period of peace to covertly and quietly exterminate and disarm TTP terrorists instead of making any significant concessions to them. However, these negotiations should not be conditional, and TTP should not be given any favourable terms as this would only boost their terrorist actions (Bangash, Personal interview, September 8, 2022).

An expert said that the TTP is in a weak position currently, so there is no reason to negotiate with them. One reason for peace talks with them might have been that if TTP members stayed in Afghanistan, any militant group could use them against Pakistan.

### **Second Phase of Peace Negotiations with TTP**

On January 15, 2022, the second phase of peace negotiations began between the TTP and Pakistan in Afghanistan. Pakistan sent a delegation to Paktika, Afghanistan, to meet with TTP leader Noor Wali Mehsud and talk about peace. Pakistan handed over two key leaders of the TTP, Muslim Khan and Mehmood Khan, to the Afghan Taliban, who were mediating peace talks between the TTP and Pakistan (Khattak, 2022).

### **TTP Demands in Peace Talks**

The TTP's demands are included in the most recent developments in the peace talks. The foremost demand of the TTP is the restoration of the FATA's former status. Another demand is to release the leaders of the former FATA region, reduce Pakistani security personnel there, and drop all charges against them (Sinha, 2022).

### **End of Peace Talks**

In November 2022, when Pakistani officials were visiting Kabul, the TTP ended the ceasefire with Pakistan. It has also urged its military wing to attack military targets anywhere there is a chance to do so. In a statement, the TTP said that despite their fighters' patience for peace, they had to break the truce since the government had begun a fresh operation against them (Khan, 2022).

### **Recommendations**

It is important for Afghanistan to make sure that it keeps its promise of not allowing its soil to be used against any other state in the world. The militant groups like Al-Qaida, TTP, IS-K and BLA based in Afghanistan must be dealt with an iron hand.

The Taliban must acknowledge the contribution of women to society and national development and provide an atmosphere where females have easy access to modern education and job opportunities. The prohibition on all forms of women's education must be lifted immediately. In addition, they ought to recognise the multitude of languages and racial groups and establish an inclusive rather than an exclusive administration. The real issues and grievances of local people must be addressed on an urgent basis.

It is important for the two countries to work together to handle issues of shared security and diplomacy rather than point fingers and level accusations at each other.

The current Taliban government is now more capable of making improvements in every field of life. In order to achieve long-term peace, the government must respect Afghanistan's ethnic, religious, sectarian, and political diversity, as well as the country's human and women's rights. Since the unfavourable internal dynamics present security issues for Afghanistan's immediate neighbours and other nations in the region, the Afghan interim government also needs to address the genuine concerns of their neighbours and the international community.



The Taliban will find it simpler to gain recognition if they can garner domestic and, at the very least, regional support.

Here, SCO must play a significant role. Instead of using force, the Afghan problem needs to be solved via constructive dialogue.

Focus on making it easier for Afghans to obtain visas, particularly for learners and patients. Make border crossing simple and seamless, which is currently the complete opposite. The current demand is for smooth commerce transactions in Turkham, Chamman, Ghulam Khan, and Angoor Adda. Similarly, it is crucial to ensure the efficient running of the Afghan transit trade.

### **Conclusion**

It was generally believed that the US withdrawal from Afghanistan would create a civil war situation. However, the Doha Agreement of February 2020 resulted in a peaceful withdrawal of the United States and its ally forces from Afghanistan, leaving the Taliban comfortably able to form an interim government in Afghanistan. It was unusual for President Ashraf Ghani to leave office and for Kabul to be taken over by the Taliban so quickly. Pakistan anticipates that the Taliban will fulfil its commitments to uphold human rights, particularly those of women and minorities, and the counterterrorism guarantees made to the world community as provided in the Doha Agreement, such as taking action against the TTP and Al Qaeda. The deteriorating conditions over the last four decades have had an impact on all of the neighbouring countries, but Pakistan was the most severely impacted.

Similarly, Pakistan's geo-economic policy of regional integration depends on peace in Afghanistan. In view of the evolving circumstances, Pakistan has argued for a regional plan to cope with the Taliban's future leadership in Afghanistan as well as for a mutually accepted transition. Effectively addressing the mounting challenges will require a long-term, proactive and comprehensive approach focused on ongoing engagement and diplomacy, as both success and failure have substantial consequences.

The Taliban coming into power in Afghanistan intensified the regional terrorist organisations like the TTP and IS-K in Pakistan. Over the past few years, Pakistan's security has been seriously threatened by extremist organisations based in Afghanistan. It has consistently criticized India's role in support terrorism in Pakistan from Afghan territory and has also given the world community enough proof of India's involvement.

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