

PAKISTAN'S COUNTER TERRORISM AND CO-OPERATION STRATEGY: A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of Pakistan's counter-terrorism approach and its cooperative agreement with the broader South Asian regional context. Besides the 1980s, terrorism has always been a major security issue for Pakistan, with the intensity rising during the Soviet Afghan War and the 9/11 attacks. Pakistan has had to deal with very harsh consequences, such as losing more than 70,000 people, billions of dollars in economic cost, and continuous political unrest. However, at the same time, as the centre of regional security dynamics, Pakistan has become vital in developing cooperative measures against terrorism. The writer places Pakistan's case in the context of realism and functionalism, delving into the origin of its counter-terrorism measures and discussing its ties with India, Afghanistan, SAARC, ECO, and SCO. The study concludes that Pakistan's latest military campaigns and the National Action Plan turned around against militancy, but all became very fragile without full cooperation from across the region. Moreover, the paper also points to the problems of Indo-Pak rivalry, turmoil in Afghanistan, and lack of confidence that continues to exist in South Asia as the factors that make it difficult for Pakistan to succeed. The final part urges Pakistan to synchronize its domestic reforms with the multilateral strategies by building up its socio-economic sector, cutting ties with extremist groups, and supporting Afghan peace talks. The functionalist approach to regionalism can be the path through which the South Asian region will ultimately defeat terrorism and reap the benefits from the prosperity that comes with it.

Keywords: SAARC, ECO, SCO, Militancy, Counterterrorism, NAP

Introduction

Terrorism remains one of the most persistent and complex security challenges confronting South Asia, with Pakistan occupying a pivotal position due to its geography, historical involvement in regional conflicts, and evolving internal security landscape. Over the past two decades, Pakistan has transitioned from being perceived primarily as a frontline state in the global war on terror to a country grappling with the internal consequences of prolonged militancy. While extensive literature exists on Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts, much of it remains descriptive, focusing either on military operations or geopolitical dynamics in isolation. This creates a gap in understanding how domestic counterterrorism strategies interact with regional cooperation frameworks.

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This paper addresses that gap by integrating Pakistan's internal counterterrorism evolution with its regional engagements through a theoretical lens. It argues that Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy is structurally constrained by a regional environment dominated by realist competition, which undermines functionalist prospects for cooperation. Although Pakistan has made measurable progress through military operations, institutional reforms, and international compliance mechanisms, these gains remain vulnerable due to limited regional trust, political rivalries, and fragmented cooperation.

The central research question guiding this study is: To what extent do regional dynamics shape the effectiveness of Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy? By answering this question, the paper contributes to broader debates on counterterrorism effectiveness in conflict-prone regions.¹

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative analytical methodology based on secondary data. Sources include academic literature, think tank reports, government documents, and international organization publications. The methodology is interpretive, aiming to critically synthesize existing knowledge rather than generate new empirical data.

The paper applies a dual theoretical framework, realism and functionalism, Realism vs. Functionalism to analyse Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy. Realism is used to explain persistent regional mistrust and strategic competition, while functionalism provides a lens to evaluate cooperative mechanisms such as regional organizations and multilateral initiatives. This combined approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of why cooperation remains limited despite shared threats.

Theoretical Framework: Realism vs. Functionalism

Realism and functionalism offer contrasting explanations for state behaviour and regional cooperation. Realism emphasizes the anarchic nature of the international system, where states prioritize survival, security, and relative gains. In such an environment, mistrust is pervasive, and cooperation is often short-lived or instrumental. In South Asia, realism is reflected in enduring rivalries, particularly between India and Pakistan, nuclear deterrence dynamics, and mutual accusations of proxy warfare. Functionalism, by contrast, suggests that cooperation in technical and non-political domains, such as trade, health, or counterterrorism, can gradually build trust and spill over into broader political collaboration.

Regional institutions like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) embody this logic by providing platforms for dialogue and cooperation. However, this paper argues that Pakistan's experience demonstrates the dominance of realist constraints over functionalist aspirations. While institutional frameworks exist, their effectiveness is undermined by deep-seated political mistrust, competing strategic interests, and security dilemmas.²

Evolution of Pakistan's Counterterrorism Strategy

Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy has evolved significantly over time, moving from reactive and fragmented responses to a more structured and institutionalized approach.

Phase 1: Reactive Engagement (Pre-2009)

In the early years following 9/11, Pakistan's response to terrorism was largely reactive and externally driven. Cooperation with the United States led to military operations in tribal areas, but these efforts lacked coherence and were often perceived domestically as externally imposed. Militancy intensified during this period, culminating in the rise of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Phase 2: Kinetic Consolidation (2009–2014)

A shift occurred with major military operations such as *Rah-e-Nijat* and *Zarb-e-Azb*. These operations targeted militant strongholds and significantly disrupted terrorist networks. The state demonstrated its capacity to use force effectively, resulting in a noticeable decline in large-scale terrorist attacks.³

Phase 3: Institutionalization (Post-2014)

The 2014 Army Public School attack marked a turning point, leading to the introduction of the National Action Plan (NAP). This comprehensive framework expanded counterterrorism beyond military operations to include legal reforms, financial regulation, and counter-extremism measures. Institutions such as the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) were strengthened to improve coordination.

Despite these advancements, implementation gaps remain. While military successes are evident, progress in areas such as judicial reform, madrasa regulation, and counter-radicalization has been uneven.

Regional Constraints on Counterterrorism Effectiveness

Indo-Pak Rivalry: A Structural Impediment

The Indo-Pak relationship represents the most significant obstacle to regional counterterrorism cooperation. Rooted in historical conflicts and territorial disputes, particularly over Kashmir, this rivalry reflects classic realist dynamics. Both states perceive each other as primary security threats, leading to a persistent security dilemma.

Counterterrorism has become deeply politicized within this context. India accuses Pakistan of supporting militant groups, while Pakistan alleges Indian involvement in destabilizing activities within its territory. These competing narratives prevent the development of shared frameworks for cooperation.

As a result, regional platforms such as SAARC remain largely ineffective. Even limited cooperation, such as intelligence sharing or joint investigations, fails to materialize due to a lack of trust. This illustrates how realist competition overrides functionalist opportunities.

Afghanistan: Spill-over Effects and Strategic Complexity

Afghanistan plays a central role in shaping Pakistan's security environment. Decades of conflict have created porous borders and transnational militant networks. The resurgence of the Taliban in 2021 and the reactivation of TTP operations highlight the limitations of unilateral counterterrorism strategies.

From a realist perspective, divergent strategic interests between Pakistan and the Afghan authorities hinder cooperation. While Pakistan prioritizes border security and countering TTP, Afghan actors have historically viewed Pakistan with suspicion. Functionalist mechanisms such as joint border management have struggled to gain traction.

Regional Organizations: Limited Functionalism

Regional institutions offer potential avenues for cooperation but remain constrained.

- SAARC: Despite legal frameworks on terrorism, SAARC is largely inactive due to political tensions.
- SCO: Provides more effective mechanisms, including joint exercises and intelligence sharing, yet its broader geopolitical agenda limits focus on South Asia-specific issues.

These institutions demonstrate that cooperation mechanisms exist but lack the political will required for effectiveness.⁴

Major Counter-Terrorism Operations

Pakistan gradually escalated its military response. Key operations included:

1. **Operation Rah-e-Nijat (2009):** Targeted militants in South Waziristan, destroying TTP strongholds while forcing thousands of civilians to flee.
2. **Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014):** This operation, which was started in response to the attack on Karachi Airport, removed militant sanctuaries from North Waziristan. Although many militants fled into Afghanistan, it was widely praised as a success.
3. **Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017):** a national campaign that emphasizes counter-extremism, de-radicalization, and intelligence-based operations.

These operations had cut down on large-scale terrorist attacks by a huge amount by the end of the 2010s. The Global Terrorism Index shows that the number of people killed by terrorism in Pakistan dropped significantly after 2015, which suggests that military campaigns were relatively successful.

The National Action Plan (NAP)

In response to the 2014 Army Public School massacre, Pakistan unveiled the NAP, a 20-point strategy to combat terrorism and extremism. Its provisions included:

1. Establishing military courts for the swift prosecution of terrorists.
2. Regulating madrassas and curbing hate speech.
3. Banning extremist organizations and choking their financing.
4. Strengthening NACTA.

NAP was Pakistan's first full plan for fighting terrorism. The plan showed that the government knew that fighting terrorism needed more than just military force, even though progress has been slow in some areas, like madrasa reforms and prosecutions.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Challenge

Pakistan was on the FATF grey list from 2018 to 2022, which showed that people around the world were worried about how terrorists were getting money. Pakistan had to pass stricter financial laws, freeze the assets of militants, and make anti-money laundering systems stronger because of this outside pressure. Pakistan's removal from the grey list in

2022 was seen as a success in both diplomacy and the fight against terrorism, as it showed that the country was following global rules better.

Socio-Economic and Political Costs

The price of terrorism for Pakistan has been huge. Pakistan says it lost more than \$120 billion between 2001 and 2018, which hurt trade, investment, and infrastructure. Tourism dropped sharply, and investors lost faith. Terrorism forced millions of people to leave their homes, especially in tribal areas. In terms of politics, terrorism made civilians and the military trust each other less, since counterterrorism was often led by the military with little civilian oversight.

Pakistanis suffered from ongoing insecurity on a human level. Urban suicide bombings damaged public confidence in the state's security capabilities. Communities were split along ethnic and sectarian lines, and political discussions were polarized by the victimization versus complicity narrative.

Current Trends

Although it had significantly decreased, terrorism in Pakistan had not completely vanished by the early 2020s. The Afghan Taliban's comeback in 2021 sparked worries about a domino effect. After regrouping in Afghanistan, the TTP began attacking across the border. Pakistan's struggle is far from over, as evidenced by recent violence in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Analysts caution that Pakistan runs the risk of experiencing a cyclical resurgence of militancy in the absence of regional cooperation, governance reforms, and political consensus.

Regional Dimensions of Terrorism

In South Asia, terrorism rarely stays inside national boundaries. Militancy has a transnational character because of the region's conflicts, porous borders, and long-standing rivalries. Therefore, it is necessary to place Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy within these larger regional dynamics in order to comprehend it.⁸

India: Militancy and Cross-Border Accusations

Pakistan has long been charged by India with funding terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. The 1989 insurgency led to decades of conflict, with militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) being held accountable for significant attacks like the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the 2001 Indian Parliament attack. According to Pakistan, these organizations came into being as a result of the Kashmiri

people's fight for self-determination and India's purported violations of their human rights.

A cycle of accusations and retaliation has resulted, undermining regional counterterrorism cooperation. Pakistan cites India's alleged involvement in using intelligence networks to destabilize Balochistan, while India declines to participate in joint mechanisms with Pakistan, arguing that Islamabad harbours militant "proxies." SAARC is paralyzed by this mistrust, as evidenced by the cancellation or downgrading of multiple summits. Instead of serving as a common goal, counterterrorism has turned into another arena of conflict between India and Pakistan.

Afghanistan: The Epicentre of Regional Instability

The biggest influence on Pakistan's experience with terrorism has been the unpredictability of Afghanistan. Direct spill-over effects were caused by the Soviet invasion, the civil wars that followed, the Taliban's rule, and the U.S. presence after 2001. The boundaries between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban became hazy as militants freely crossed the Durand Line.

Pakistan has long maintained that TTP attacks within its borders are facilitated by militant sanctuaries in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Afghan governments, particularly those led by Presidents Ashraf Ghani and Hamid Karzai, charged Pakistan with providing sanctuary to Afghan Taliban leaders. A vicious cycle has been established by this reciprocal blame, impeding genuine collaboration.

The 2021 Taliban takeover changed things again. At first, Pakistan embraced it as a chance for stability, but the truth has been sobering. Under the protection of the Afghan Taliban, the TTP has reorganized and begun carrying out cross-border assaults. There have been more border clashes between the Taliban and Pakistani forces. As a result, Afghanistan continues to be a source of instability and a crucial test for Pakistan's regional strategy.

Sri Lanka: The LTTE and Lessons Learned

Despite their geographical separation, Pakistan can learn from Sri Lanka's experience with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The LTTE established a quasi-state in northern Sri Lanka, killed political figures, and invented the use of suicide bombing as a tactic. Before the LTTE was soundly defeated by the Sri Lankan military in 2009, the civil war raged for almost thirty years.

Sri Lanka serves as a reminder to Pakistan of the perils of protracted insurgencies as well as the possibility of forceful state action. During its campaign, Pakistan offered military support to Colombo, demonstrating Islamabad's readiness to fight regional terrorism outside of its immediate neighbourhood. But Sri Lanka's human rights issues also serve as a warning: if political grievances are not resolved, military triumphs might not be enough to bring about enduring peace.

Bangladesh: Radicalization and Political Polarization

Islamist militancy has been a problem in Bangladesh, especially during the 2000s when organizations such as Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) carried out coordinated bombings all over the nation. Attacks like the 2016 siege of a café in Dhaka have more recently demonstrated the tenacity of extremist networks.

Dhaka frequently harbours misgivings about Pakistan, pointing to old grievances from 1971 and charging Islamabad with supporting extremist organizations. Counterterrorism cooperation is hampered by this mistrust. However, Bangladesh's own tactics of strict law enforcement, secular legislation, and international cooperation provide alternate models from which Pakistan could learn.

Nepal and Smaller States: The Maoist Insurgency and Fragile States

The Maoist insurgency that lasted from 1996 to 2006 in Nepal serves as an example of how terrorism in South Asia is not limited to Islamist movements. The insurgency, which had its roots in political marginalization and economic inequality, caused over 13,000 deaths and upended Nepal's monarchy. Maoists were eventually incorporated into mainstream politics through a peace process, underscoring the value of political inclusion as a tactic against insurgency.

Trafficking and radicalization continue to be growing threats for smaller South Asian nations like Bhutan and the Maldives. For example, the Maldives has one of the highest rates of foreign fighters joining foreign extremist groups per capita. These instances demonstrate how even tiny states add to the problem of regional security.

Regional Organizations and the Problem of Cooperation

The problem of terrorism is made worse by South Asia's inadequate institutional frameworks. The Additional Protocol on Terrorist Financing (2004) and the Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism (1987) were ratified by SAARC, which was founded in 1985. However, there hasn't been much implementation. SAARC summits are

frequently derailed by political disagreements, especially tensions between India and Pakistan.

Limited alternatives are offered by other organizations. Although Pakistan is connected to Iran, Turkey, and Central Asia through the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the organization has prioritized trade over terrorism. In contrast, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of the SCO has a more robust counterterrorism mandate. Since joining in 2017, Pakistan has had the opportunity to share intelligence and conduct joint exercises with China, Russia, and other Central Asian nations. The SCO's wide membership, however, lessens its ability to effectively address the unique conflicts in South Asia.

The Nuclear Factor and the Security Dilemma

The existence of nuclear weapons is one particular aspect of the terrorism issue in South Asia. India and Pakistan both have nuclear weapons, and counterterrorism measures are made more difficult by the threat of nuclear escalation. For example, the attacks on the Indian Parliament in 2001 and the Mumbai attacks in 2008 nearly resulted in war between India and Pakistan. The 2016 Indian "surgical strikes" and the 2019 Balakot airstrikes served as further evidence of how acts of terrorism can turn into interstate conflicts.

This nuclear backdrop supports the realist viewpoint, according to which states put survival and deterrence above collaboration. Additionally, because a mistake could have disastrous results, it increases the urgency of regional counterterrorism.

Regional Terrorism: A Shared but Divisive Threat

Two paradoxes are brought to light by the regional aspects of terrorism. First, terrorism is recognized as a shared threat by all South Asian nations. Second, as states accuse one another of complicity, terrorism has frequently widened rather than healed divisions. Pakistan is at the centre of this conundrum because, although it wants to be recognized as a victim of terrorism, its neighbours in the region frequently treat it suspiciously. New cooperative frameworks that go beyond bilateral blame games are needed to break this cycle.

Pakistan's Cooperative Strategies

Although Pakistan has mostly used military operations and changes to national policy to fight terrorism internally, regional and international cooperation is crucial to the fight's success. Unilateral state action is insufficient to fully address terrorism because it is

a transnational phenomenon. Pakistan has pursued a number of cooperative strategies at the bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels in recognition of this. However, because of conflicting geopolitical interests, political limitations, and a lack of trust, these initiatives have had a mixed effect.¹²

SAARC and the Promise of Regional Cooperation

Since its founding in 1985, Pakistan has actively participated in the SAARC. In theory, SAARC offers a crucial forum for counterterrorism and collective security. One of the first regional legal instruments of its kind was the 1987 SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, which required member states to extradite suspects and deny safe havens to terrorists. The 2004 Additional Protocol on Terrorist Financing subsequently added to this, pledging participants to stop money laundering and stop funding extremist organizations.

Pakistan, which has ratified both agreements and called for increased implementation, has continuously underlined the significance of these frameworks. However, SAARC is paralyzed by the intense animosity between India and Pakistan. Bilateral tensions have caused several summits to be overshadowed or canceled, most notably the 2016 Islamabad summit, which India boycotted after the Uri attack. Pakistan is thus caught in a paradox: although it acknowledges the potential for counterterrorism cooperation within SAARC, political disagreements hinder the organization's ability to operate efficiently.

Bilateral Engagements with Afghanistan

Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy cannot be successful without collaboration with Afghanistan due to the porous border and shared militant networks. But historically, there has been a lot of mistrust in this relationship. While Pakistan claimed that the TTP operated freely from Afghan territory, the Afghan government accused Pakistan of providing sanctuary to Taliban leaders.

The Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS), which sought to institutionalize security and intelligence sharing discussions, is one example of an effort at cooperation. The Taliban have also participated in several rounds of peace negotiations in Pakistan, most notably in 2015 and again during the U.S.-Taliban talks that resulted in the 2020 Doha Agreement. Cooperation is still brittle in spite of these efforts. The Taliban's comeback in 2021 has made things even more difficult. Although Pakistan applauded the end of American occupation, the Taliban's acceptance of TTP activity has strained relations between the two countries.

Pakistan nevertheless maintains its support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, highlighting the importance of Afghan stability for regional counterterrorism. Practically speaking, Pakistan has strengthened border crossings, raised border fencing along the Durand Line, and carried out security operations against militants who cross the border. However, these actions remain limited unless Kabul reciprocates.

Cooperation with China and the SCO

Counterterrorism has emerged as a crucial element of Pakistan's relationship with China, its most important strategic partner. Security cooperation is essential because Beijing has invested billions of dollars in infrastructure projects in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Both nations have been pressured to strengthen their combined counterterrorism efforts by militants who target Chinese laborers and projects, especially in Baluchistan.

Pakistan has gained new opportunities at the multilateral level since joining the SCO in 2017. The RATS of the SCO offers channels for counter-extremism collaboration, cooperative military drills, and intelligence exchange. Along with China, Russia, and other Central Asian nations, Pakistan has taken an active part in SCO counterterrorism exercises. With the help of this platform, Pakistan can strengthen its ties with Eurasian nations and expand its security alliances outside of the United States. However, the SCO's effectiveness in combating terrorism is occasionally undermined by its wide-ranging agenda and conflicting interests.

Engagement with the United States and the West

Pakistan and the United States have a long history of counterterrorism cooperation, despite tensions. Pakistan emerged as a "major non-NATO ally" after 9/11, obtaining billions of dollars in economic and military assistance in return for intelligence and logistical support. Throughout its operations in Afghanistan, the United States mainly depended on Pakistani supply routes. Al-Qaeda agents were also apprehended with the help of Pakistani intelligence.

Mistrust has tainted the relationship. Islamabad resented American drone strikes on its territory, while Washington charged Pakistan with providing sanctuary to the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network. This mistrust was exemplified by the 2011 U.S. raid in Abbottabad that resulted in the death of Osama bin Laden. However, counterterrorism cooperation persisted despite tensions, underscoring its strategic importance.

Cooperation has changed in recent years to focus on financial compliance, especially through the FATF. Pakistan was forced by Western pressure to strengthen its anti-terror financing legislation, freeze the assets of militants, and make its banking system more transparent. In addition to strengthening Pakistan's domestic counterterrorism framework, these reforms enhanced its reputation abroad.

Role in the United Nations and Global Regimes

Additionally, Pakistan has sided with the United Nations' international counterterrorism tools. It has participated in discussions held by the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee and is a party to the 13 UN conventions and protocols against terrorism. Pakistan shows its dedication to stability around the world by sending troops to UN peacekeeping operations.

Furthermore, Pakistan has made the case at the UN that legitimate self-determination movements, especially in Kashmir, should be separated from counterterrorism efforts. Although this position makes it more difficult to reach an agreement, it is consistent with Pakistan's larger argument that political grievances must be taken into consideration when combating terrorism.

Domestic-Institutional Cooperation: NACTA and Provincial Mechanisms

Pakistan has made an internal effort to formalize collaboration between its own provinces and agencies. The NACTA was created as a focal point for policymaking and intelligence coordination. Despite being weak and underfunded at first, NACTA has progressively increased its role, particularly under NAP. With the help of intelligence-based operations, provincial police counterterrorism departments (CTDs) have also improved coordination with federal agencies. Despite being mainly domestic in nature, these initiatives show Pakistan's understanding that counterterrorism calls for collaboration at all levels: federal, provincial, regional, and international.

Limitations and Missed Opportunities

Even with these collaborative tactics, Pakistan still has a lot of obstacles to overcome. The outcomes of its reliance on bilateral channels with Afghanistan have been inconsistent. The Indo-Pak rivalry still holds SAARC hostage. Although it is not region-specific, SCO provides opportunities. Due to changes in geopolitics, U.S. cooperation is erratic. Bureaucratic inertia affects even domestic organizations like NACTA.

The bigger issue is the lack of trust: Pakistan believes that its enemies have politicized counterterrorism, and its neighbours frequently question its motives. Cooperative strategies will continue to be incomplete and brittle until this cycle is broken.

Challenges to Pakistan's Strategy

Pakistan faces significant obstacles in its counterterrorism and cooperative strategy, even with the achievements of military operations and institutional reforms. These are structural limitations with roots in international politics, regional rivalries, and domestic governance rather than just tactical issues.¹⁵

The Indo-Pak Trust Deficit

The ongoing animosity between India and Pakistan is by far the biggest barrier. A cycle of mutual recrimination is created as each state accuses the other of sponsoring terrorism. Attacks such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the 2001 Parliament attack represent Pakistan's purported tolerance of militant proxies in India's eyes. India's actions in Baluchistan and its expanding influence in Afghanistan are perceived by Pakistan as efforts to undermine the country. SAARC is paralyzed by this zero-sum mentality, which makes what could be a cooperative framework a victim of bilateral conflicts. Regional counterterrorism won't work until India and Pakistan build even a minimal amount of trust.

Instability in Afghanistan

Pakistan is still affected by Afghanistan's instability. Although Islamabad initially welcomed the Afghan Taliban's return to power in 2021, tensions have since increased. The TTP has resumed its attacks after finding refuge on the other side of the border. There have been no significant outcomes from diplomatic efforts with Kabul. Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts are made more difficult by this insecurity, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, and border management is compromised.

Governance Weaknesses

Pakistan's ability to govern at home is still lacking. Lack of political will, bureaucratic rivalries, and a lack of funding have all been problems for organizations like NACTA. Many militants can elude justice because of the court system's backlog, witness intimidation, and lax prosecution. Since priorities change when governments change, political polarization and corruption further jeopardize the coherence of counterterrorism policies.

Human Security Deficits

In Pakistan, radicalization is a result of both socioeconomic hardship and militant networks. Extremist narratives thrive in environments of poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, and inadequate social services. Millions of kids are still not in school, and many of them attend unlicensed madrassas that spread intolerance. Without tackling these underlying issues, counterterrorism initiatives that only use military force will find it difficult to produce long-lasting effects.

Climate Change and Resource Conflicts

Terrorism also intersects with non-traditional security threats. Pakistan faces resource scarcity, droughts, and floods, making it extremely vulnerable to climate change. Extremist recruitment, communal tensions, and displacement can all be exacerbated by these stressors. There are concerns that water disputes could exacerbate the conflicts in the region, as evidenced by the strain on the Indus Waters Treaty with India. Thus, climate insecurity erodes regional stability and increases the likelihood of terrorism.

International Pressures and Geopolitical Competition

Lastly, international politics influence Pakistan's approach. Islamabad's policies are influenced by pressure from the FATF to comply, China's security concerns under the CPEC, and U.S. expectations to "do more." These outside demands occasionally clash with Pakistan's internal priorities, posing problems for decision-makers. The pursuit of a cogent and consistent counterterrorism strategy is complicated by the balancing act between strategic autonomy and outside pressure.

Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

Policy Recommendations

1. Strengthen Domestic Institutions:

For NACTA to function as a true central coordinating body, Pakistan needs to provide it with resources, personnel, and political support. Protecting prosecutors and witnesses should be the top priority of judicial reforms in order to prevent militants from taking advantage of legal loopholes.¹⁸

2. Invest in Human Security:

Force is not enough to combat terrorism. Pakistan needs to increase access to jobs, healthcare, and education, especially in areas that are prone to conflict. De-radicalization requires the inclusion of madrassas in the regular curriculum and the expansion of vocational training.

3. **Enhance Border Management with Afghanistan:**

Reducing militant infiltration can be achieved through controlled crossings, biometric systems, and fencing. More significantly, Pakistan ought to hold formal discussions with Kabul to put pressure on the Taliban to stop the TTP.

4. **Revitalize SAARC Mechanisms:**

India and Pakistan ought to resurrect the SAARC Regional Convention on Terrorism and disentangle counterterrorism from other conflicts. Even a small amount of collaboration on financial tracking and intelligence sharing would be a beneficial step to boost confidence.

5. **Deepen SCO Engagement:**

Pakistan should increase intelligence cooperation with China, Russia, and Central Asia and conduct more joint exercises by utilizing the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure. Pakistan's resilience will be strengthened by these partnerships' diversification.

6. **Promote Afghan-Owned Peace Processes:**

Pakistan needs to encourage the Taliban to engage in talks with other political players and support inclusive governance in Afghanistan. Pakistan's security depends on Afghanistan remaining stable.

7. **Disconnect State Structures from Extremist Patronage:**

Groups that have historically been utilized for strategic depth must be aggressively targeted by the state. If some militants are targeted while others are tolerated, no counterterrorism strategy will be successful.

Conclusion

The history of Pakistan's fight against terrorism is one of tenacity, selflessness, and hardship. Pakistan has lost a great number of people and resources as a result of the Afghan jihad's fallout and the post-9/11 insurgency. The state has made great strides through financial reforms, the NAP, and large military operations. However, in the absence of consistent regional cooperation, these accomplishments remain precarious.

The regional aspect is essential. South Asian terrorism is cross-border, and no state can eradicate it on its own. Although political mistrust has impeded progress, Pakistan's efforts through SAARC, ECO, SCO, and bilateral dialogues demonstrate its recognition of this fact. Pakistan needs to match cooperative regional strategies with domestic reforms in order to overcome this. It will be crucial to stabilize Afghanistan, invest in human security, and cultivate trust with India.

In the end, a functional regional framework is necessary for sustainable counterterrorism, one in which political trust progressively develops from technical and

economic cooperation. Pakistan, which is in the centre of South Asia, has the chance and the duty to spearhead this change. In addition to securing its own future, Pakistan can promote peace and prosperity in the region by pursuing inclusive, multilateral, and people-centred strategies.

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